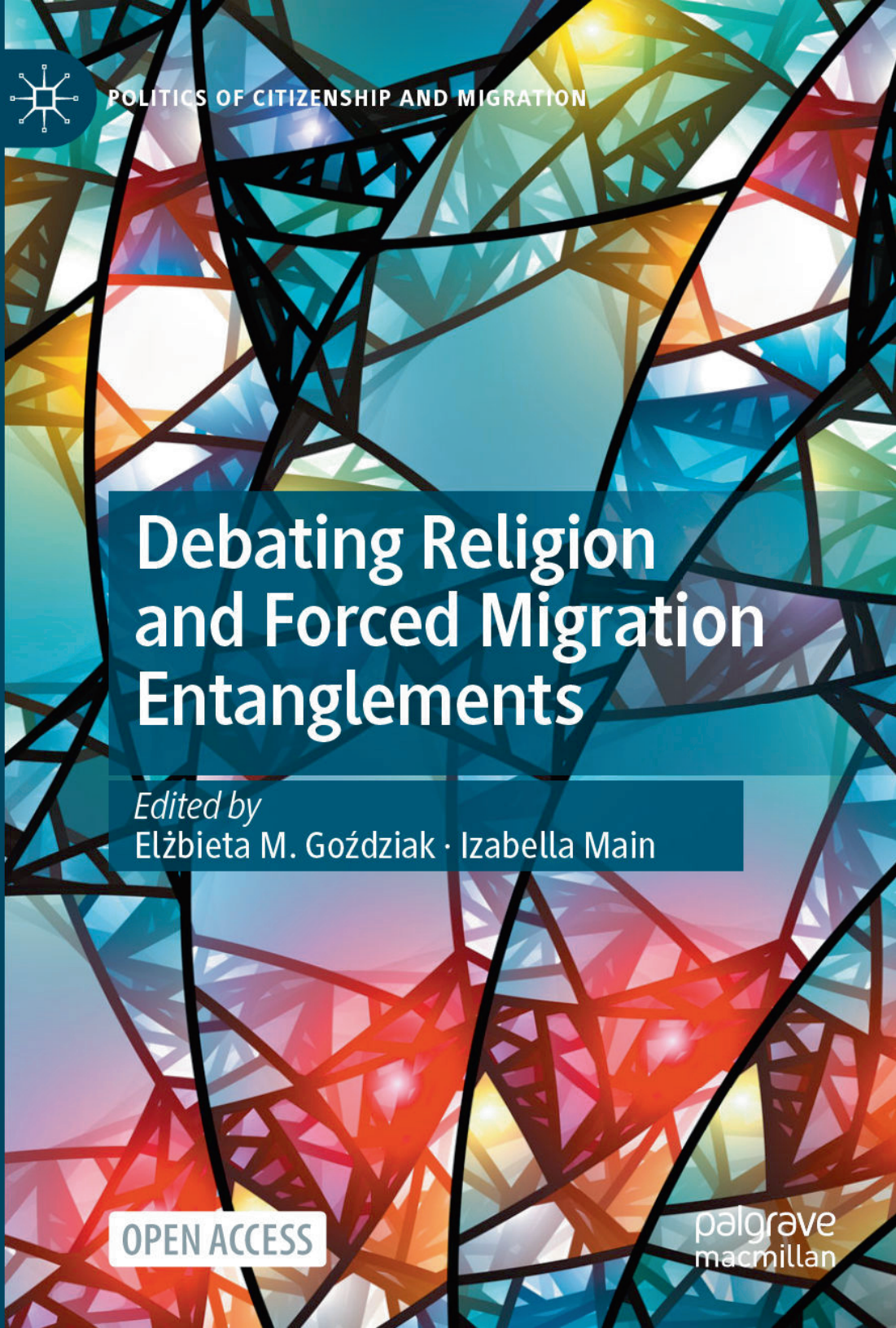
POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION
Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements
Edited by
Elżbieta M. Goździak · Izabella Main
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Praise for *Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements*

"This volume casts new light on an age-old issue—the role of religion in forced migration. Gozdziak and Main have brought together articles focused on the intersection of politics, religion and asylum; the lived religious experiences of the displaced; and the role of faith actors in responding to forced migration. With chapters by both academics and practitioners, *Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements* contributes immensely to our knowledge of forced migration and religion."

—Susan Martin, *Donald G. Herzberg Professor Emerita of International Migration, Georgetown University*

"*Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements* is a welcome addition to the expanding literature on religion and forced migration that has emerged over the past two decades. It both expands the theoretical framing of how we think about the religion and forced migration nexus and enriches the available bank of case studies by drawing on an impressive array of material spanning Norway to Zimbabwe to the United States and beyond. By combining perspectives from both advocates and scholars, this book breaks down the false dichotomy between them."

—Dianna Shandy, *Professor of Anthropology, Macalester College and Scholar-in-Residence, Elon University, Author of* Nuer American Passages: Globalizing Sudanese Migration

"The intersection of religion and migration is one of the most important and yet underexplored questions of our times. Bringing in conversation scholars with spiritual leaders and NGO representatives, this volume provides a much-needed contribution to understanding how religion shapes and is shaped by the lived experience of refugees, faith-based organizations, and ordinary people. Interrogating the 'compelling, competing, and contradictory' manifestations of religion, the contributors bring us through a journey where ethnocentrism, trauma, and persecution cross path with hope, solidarity, and spirituality, thus shedding light on the complexities of the current refugee crisis. An essential reading for both academics and practitioners."

—Luca Mavelli, *Reader in Politics and IR at the University of Kent, UK, Author of* Neoliberal Citizenship: Sacred Markets, Sacrificial Lives (OUP, 2022)

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CHAPTER 1

What's God Got to Do with It? Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements

Elżbieta M. Goździak and Izabella Main

Violent conflicts, social unrest, and other humanitarian crises around the world have led to growing numbers of people seeking refuge in both the global North and the global South. Forced displacement and migration have always been part and parcel of spiritual development. However, the current *refugee crisis* in Europe and elsewhere in the world has brought to the fore fervent discussions regarding the role of religion in defining difference, linking the refugee crisis with Islam, and fear of the *Other*. Many religious institutions, spiritual leaders, and politicians invoke religious values and call for strict border controls to resolve the "crisis." However, equally many humanitarian organizations and refugee advocates

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use religious values to inform their call to action, to welcome asylum seekers and refugees, to provide them with assistance, and to facilitate integration processes.

Religion and Spirituality

What is religion? The word has Latin roots: *religio* (respect for what is sacred) and *religare* (to bind, in the sense of an obligation). French sociologist Émile Durkheim defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things." In Durkheim's conceptualization, the sacred meant extraordinary—something that inspired wonder and which was connected to "the divine." Durkheim argued that "religion happens" in society when there is a separation between the profane (ordinary life) and the sacred (Durkheim, 1915, p. 45).

Durkheim is generally considered the first sociologist who analyzed religion in terms of its societal impact. Durkheim believed that religion is about community: it binds people together (social cohesion), promotes behavior consistency (social control), and offers people strength during life's transitions and tragedies (meaning and purpose) (McGivern, 2013).

Religion is a Western concept (Fitzgerald, 2007). Similar concepts do not exist in many past and present cultures; there is no equivalent term in many languages (Morreall & Sonn, 2013; Nongbri, 2013). Dubuisson (2007, p. 18) suggested replacing the study of religion with the study of "cosmographic formations," a category that includes various attempts to "describe the world and tell this or that group of humans, or even all of humanity, how to live in it." The anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined religion as a

> […] system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

He further remarked:

> […] we have very little idea of how, in empirical terms, this particular miracle is accomplished. We just know that it is done, annually, weekly, daily, for some people almost hourly; and we have an enormous ethnographic literature to demonstrate it (Geertz, 1993, pp. 87–12).

In this volume, we stress the importance of a broad conceptualization of religion that includes both Western and non-Western religious and spiritual traditions. We recognize that religions are culturally and socially constructed. In our conceptualization, religion encompasses the socio-cultural, political, and spiritual dimensions. Spirituality used to be a "predominantly Roman Catholic term applied chiefly to certain practices of prayer within a traditional institutional church framework" (Muldoon & King, 1995, p. 331). In recent decades, however, there has been an expansion of both the meaning and the application of the term spirituality; both Christian and non-Christian traditions have begun to use the term. References to spirituality are also made in social movements such as Marxism, feminism, or even the environmental movement. "The term has broadened to connote the whole of the life of faith and even the life of the person as a whole; including its bodily, psychological, social and political dimensions" (Schneiders, 1989, p. 679).

We also emphasize lived experiences of religion defined as a dynamic phenomenon, not as a fixed set of ideas championed by religious institutions and blindly adopted by their followers. Lived experiences of religion and spirituality indicate that believers actively shape, negotiate, and change religious beliefs and practices (Nyhagen, 2017; Main & Kujawa, forthcoming). Lived religion is thus "a subjectively grounded and potentially creative place for religious experience and expression" (McGuire, 2008, p. 12).

We aim to bring about a paradigm shift in both scholarly and public debates on the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees. We also want to stress the importance of faith-based initiatives aimed at facilitating refugees' integration and well-being.

Religion and Forced Migration Nexus

Religion and forced migration are inextricably connected. Religion operates in compelling, competing, and contradictory ways as it shapes the experiences of forced migrants. Being a refugee—experiencing the suffering in wartime and during flight, loss of homeland and family, and the challenges of living in a new country—is for many forced migrants, a spiritual crisis of unparalleled severity. The basic spiritual needs—hope, meaning, relatedness, forgiveness, acceptance, and transcendence—are

threatened in forced migration. Below, we outline several points at which religion intersects with forced migration.

Religious Persecution

Religious persecution is one of the five grounds enumerated in the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, on the basis of which refugee status is determined. As Karen Musalo (2002) observed, religion is likely to gain increasing prominence as grounds for protection because of rising fundamentalism and nationalism, the relationship between religion and women's rights, and the sustained concern with religious freedom internationally and locally.

The freedom of religion—the freedom to have, not to have, practice, or not practice any religion—is a fundamental right recognized by the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief. Nowadays, that right is being tested by rising or sustained violence against individuals on the basis of religion and belief—a threat that is largely under-recognized by the international community (Gorur & Gregory, 2021).

Religious beliefs and practices have led to many armed conflicts and resulting flights. Geographical hotspots of theology-fueled armed conflicts include Sahel, Nigeria, and Somalia. Although Islamist insurgencies predominate in religious conflicts, Christian rebel groups in Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda have also been active since the turn of the millennium. Countries with diverse religious populations are also prone to interreligious conflicts; examples include the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire (Basedau, 2017). In many instances, religious persecution coupled with nationalism results in forced displacement, for example, the Rohingya in Myanmar (Mim, 2020). Over the years, Pakistani Christians have also been discriminated against and forcibly displaced (Wolf, 2021).

Religion and Trauma

Religious and spiritual beliefs support and empower many refugees through displacement, migration, and settlement. Religion and spirituality can be sources of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and

political mobilization, and a vehicle for community building (Goździak, 2002; Goździak & Shandy, 2002; Mavelli & Wilson, 2016). Programs that incorporate religion and spirituality in order to heal trauma are an excellent alternative to approaches which treat refugees' suffering as pathology and medicalize their experiences (see Bracken et al., 1995; Goździak & Tuskan, 2000; Pupavac, 2002).

Displacement affects the lives of all refugees. However, the impact of being uprooted is particularly poignant and often very traumatic for refugee women, especially when rape and sexual abuse become commonplace. Unmet spiritual needs put refugee women's integration and well-being at risk. Supporting their faith and spirituality is therefore important at every stage of the migration process.

We need to bear in mind that refugee women's engagement with religion is often very different from the experiences of refugee men. Research indicates that men and women react differently when faced with similar adverse circumstances. A study of prisoners in a Russian labor camp showed that women observed religious rituals and celebrated birthdays, while men fantasized about escape, solved chess problems, and talked incessantly about politics (Weinberg et al., 1992).

While refugee women may find solace in religious rituals, their relationship with religion, particularly organized religion, is not simple. In some cultures, women are denied both the knowledge and the practical skills required to initiate rituals. In fact, most human religions, from tribal to mainstream religions, have treated women's bodies, in their gender-specific sexual functions, as impure and polluted and thus to be distanced from sacred spaces and rites dominated by men (Ruether, 1990, p. 7). In many denominations, women are officially barred from ordination and men run the spiritual and administrative affairs of religious communities.

Not everyone finds solace in religion in the time of extreme suffering. During wars, it often seems that God has forsaken the suffering. Some war survivors go through life with the cruel words of scripture "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" on their lips (Matthew 27: 46). Elie Wiesel, writing about his experiences in concentration camps, said that after seeing innocent children burned alive, the "flames consumed my faith forever" and that the experience "murdered my God and my soul" (Wiesel, 1960, p. ix). Many soldiers returning from Vietnam remarked "I lost my soul in Vietnam" (Brende & McDonald, 1993, p. 325). Others have written about experiencing trauma at the moment when "the spirit went numb" (Mahedy, 1986, p. 32) and the development of the

soul stopped (Baker, 1989). It has been called a disorder of hope (van der Kolk, 1988), a spiritual night (Mahedy, 1986, p. 32), or a loss of wholeness (Sinclair, 1993, p. 70).

Religion in the "Refugee Crisis"

Religion took center stage in the recent "refugee crisis" in Europe (Goździak et al., 2020). In the increasingly secularized Europe, religion has, paradoxically, gained or regained significance in many policy and public debates. Religious pluralism existed in Europe for centuries; in many countries, quite unproblematically (Pickel, 2018). However, the increasing religious (and ethnic) pluralism stemming from more recent migration resulted in challenges to religious freedom and religious tolerance, despite existing anti-discrimination laws. Even prior to the recent "refugee crisis" debates about building mosques, wearing different forms of *hijab*, and providing religious education in schools abounded. This situation has changed even more dramatically in 2015. With the arrival of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, governments and the general public started to link the refugees' identity to their religion (Koening, 2005). Thus, refugees began to be equated with Muslims and Muslims with refugees. In extreme cases, refugees have been linked to Muslim fundamentalists.

Ethnocentric perspectives identified Islam as an alien and anti-democratic religion or an incubator of political conflict (see Fox, 2004; Huntington, 1996). Several recent surveys have borne out this widespread negative view of Islam and Muslim refugees (see Pickel, 2013; Welzel, 2013; Wike et al., 2016). As a result of growing Islamophobia, many policy-makers and quite a few members of the general public have called for the fortification of Europe (Schmiedel & Smith, 2018). On the other hand, the emerging pro-refugee advocacy and solidarity movements, even in countries such as Poland or Hungary, which refused to participate in the refugee relocation program, have called for openness to refugees regardless of their religion (Goździak et al., 2020).

Existing Knowledge: Religion in Refugee Studies

Twenty years ago, Dianna J. Shandy and Elżbieta M. Goździak issued a call for papers for the first-ever special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on religion and forced migration. Most authors who submitted

manuscripts for consideration indicated a dearth of research on the nexus of religion and forced migration and struggled to place their own research in a broader conceptual context. These experiences reflected a widespread state of affairs as documented at the time by initiatives launched by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the New School for Social Research in New York (Goździak & Shandy, 2002). Much has changed in the last two decades, but some things remained the same. Most publications debate religion within a broadly defined international migration, while fewer place their analyses in forced migration studies.

In migration studies, there are notable books on the role of religion in immigrant communities and the transformation of the religious landscape in the United States. Peggy Levitt's *God Needs No Passport* shows how immigrants are changing the face of religious diversity in the United States, helping to make American religion just as global as U.S. corporations. The book has important implications for today's immigration debates where commentators routinely refer to a "clash of civilizations." Levitt shows how the new realities of religion and migration are subtly challenging the very definition of what it means to be an American. *God Needs No Passport* reveals that American values are no longer just made in the United States but come from around the globe as global religious institutions enable immigrants to participate in two cultures at once—whether via religious services beamed in by satellite or through an expanding network of global religious organizations (Levitt, 2009).

Transformation of religious life in the United States is also a theme explored by contributors to the volume *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Leonard et al., 2005). The book represents a valuable addition to the canon on this topic, joining volumes by Warner and Wittner (1998) and Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) on religious organizations and networks, as well as overviews by specific ethnicity and/or religion by Haddad et al. (2003) and Min and Kim (2001).

Alex Stepick collaborated with several different colleagues to produce an important work on religion in diasporic communities. *Churches and Charity in the Immigrant City* focuses on the intersection of religion and civic engagement among Miami's immigrant and minority groups. The contributors examine the role of religious organizations in developing social relationships and how these relationships affect the broader civic world (Stepick et al., 2009).

Rey et al. (2013) collaborated on *Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith: Haitian Religion in Miami*, a historical and ethnographic study

of Haitian religion in immigrant communities. Where many studies of Haitian religion limit themselves to one faith, this book explores Catholicism, Protestantism, and Voodoo in conversation with one another, suggesting that despite the differences between these practices, the three faiths ultimately create a sense of unity, fulfillment, and self-worth in Haitian communities.

Migration is changing Canada's religious landscape as well (Pew Research Center, 2013), but the scholarship does not seem to be as robust as in the United States. Notable exceptions include Reitz et al. (2009) and Reimer and Hiemstra (2018). *Growing Up Canadian. Muslims, Christians, Buddhists,* edited by Beyer and Ramji (2013), is a study of religion among first generation of children from immigrant families in Canada. It contributes to understanding religious diversity and multiculturalism in the twenty-first century. It relates to a continuum of identities: from atheist to spiritual but not religious.

In 2013, Springer launched a new book series *Religion and Global Migration* edited by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Jennifer B. Saunders, and Susanna Snyder. Twelve books have been published in this series, covering a broad spectrum of issues and geographies. Space limitations do not allow us to mention all of them, but we want to draw the readers' attention to a few books from this series. The series editors published a collection of case studies, entitled *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads*, from a wide array of regions across the globe and showcased theological, sociological, and anthropological methods for studying religion and migration (Saunders et al., 2016). In her book on *Solidarity and Reciprocity with Migrants in Asia*, Yuen (2020) engaged Catholic and Confucian ethics and moral philosophy in a dialogue about solidarity and reciprocity. Closely related to the theme of our book is the volume *Religion in the European Refugee Crisis*, edited by Schmiedel and Smith (2018). This book examines how religion has been employed to call either for eliminating or enforcing the walls around "Fortress Europe."

When religion is considered in refugee studies, it most often receives attention for its role in conflict settings (e.g., Sandal, 2019; Schliesser et al., 2021) and the politicization of identity (Börzel & Risse, 2018). Legal scholars analyze religious persecution as grounds for asylum and refugee status. Religious-belief cases are difficult in terms of credibility assessment exactly because they require "a government or UN adjudicator to wrestle directly with the ambiguities of religious identity and faith"

(Kagan, 2010, p. 1190). Ziya Meral and Amanda Grey reported that although "the law is clear that religious persecution constitutes grounds for asylum, assessment of religion-based asylum applications is complex and challenging due to the inherently internal and personal nature of religion and belief" (Meral & Grey, 2016, p. 3). They not only point to the disparity between the Home Office policy and practice in the UK and the lack of statistics but also offer several recommendations about policy guidelines, trainings, good practices, and working with faith communities.

Drawing on ethnographic research in the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States, at the Thailand-Burma border, in Palestine, and in Cambodia, *Building Noah's Ark for Migrants, Refugees, and Religious Communities*, edited by Horstmann and Jung (2015), examines religion within the framework of refugee studies as a public good, with the spiritual and material use of religion shedding new light on the agency of refugees in reconstructing their lives and positioning themselves in hostile environments.

The plight of atheists facing persecution has also been studied. Cases of imprisonment or death threats faced by non-religious persons in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Morocco, and Indonesia—where such views are unacceptable—have been brought to the attention of human rights organizations. Refugee activists are concerned that atheists and non-religious asylum seekers are not explicitly mentioned in the 1951 UN Convention. In 2016, the UN confirmed the inclusion of atheists and non-religious refugees under the "religion" criterion. Some countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada have accepted refugees based on persecution due to atheism. However, atheism as a criterion for granting asylum is not clearly accepted by all countries and atheist/non-religious asylum seekers face structural difficulties in many places (Nixon, 2019).

Our Contributions to the Unfolding Debates

This volume brings emerging and seasoned migration and religion scholars into dialogue with spiritual leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations assisting refugees. The geographic focus of the book is global. Many chapters are based on original research, but some stem from lived experiences of solidarity with refugees. The contributors focus on activities motivated both by religious and secular beliefs.

The volume is divided into three distinct yet inter-related parts focusing on politics, values, and discourses mobilized by religious beliefs; lived experiences of religion, with a particular emphasis on identity and belonging among various refugee groups; and faith and faith actors and their responses to forced migration. The introduction and the concluding chapter bookend these three parts. The introduction explores the nexus of religion/spirituality and forced migration. It foreshadows some of the themes discussed throughout the volume.

In Part One, entitled *Politics, Values, and Discourses*, the authors engage with both religious and secular values that inform policy-making and public discourses in Hungary, Poland, and Israel. Elżbieta M. Goździak juxtaposes the Hungarian government's call for "flexible solidarity" with grassroots efforts undertaken by solidarians, conceptualized here as civil society actors, to welcome asylum seekers and facilitate their onward journey to other European countries where they might find a warmer welcome and favorable opportunities for permanent settlement. She shows how flexible solidarity promoted by the Hungarian government created deserving and undeserving refugees. She also focuses on religious leaders and their attitudes towards refugees to show how some attempted to welcome the Stranger, while others sided with the Orbán administration to advocate for solidarity abroad. The bulk of her chapter is devoted to a discussion of the ways different solidarians representing civil society organizations and informal community networks contested the government's anti-refugee policies. Her analysis shows that civil society actors provided invaluable assistance to asylum seekers, but were unable to bring about major policy changes.

Agnieszka Bielewska and Nir Cohen focus on the "migration crises" in Poland in 2015–2017 and in Israel in 2010–2011. Drawing on secondary data, they show how liberal politicians used religious and ethical narratives to advocate for more open asylum policies, whereas conservative statesmen used them to promote restrictive asylum policies. They show how the usage of historical narratives of victimization resulted in a bifurcated discourse, in which religious ethical arguments were selectively used to promote a particular political agenda.

In Part Two, entitled *Lived Experiences of Religion*, the contributors focus on the effects that lived experiences of religion have on identity and belonging. Izabela Kujawa and Ingrid Løland discuss the experiences of Syrian refugees in Turkey and in Norway, respectively.

Using interviews conducted in Istanbul and Gaziantep with Syrian refugees and representatives of the civil society organizations supporting them, Izabela Kujawa explores how religion and religious freedom are present in the rhetoric deployed in discussions surrounding Syrian refugees' presence in Turkey and their status there. Furthermore, she focuses on refugees' own experiences, expectations, and imaginaries, and the role that religion and religious tolerance play in them. She also analyzes how the theme of religion is established as an axis around which belonging and otherness are constructed and what role it plays in the process of integration.

Ingrid Løland argues that the academic literature lacks studies on the ways that lived experiences of religion inform both real and imaginary forms of temporal and spatial displacement contexts. In order to remedy the situation and more adequately capture the multidimensional and (dis)empowering aspects of religion in Syrians' migratory experiences, she applies in her research a dynamic trajectory lens, in which the parameters of time and space are existentially acknowledged. She is therefore able to show how migration trajectories span pre-migratory life, revolution, war, flight, and exile in multiple and overlapping ways. Furthermore, she explores migration trajectories as a mirror of hybrid memory practices through which the symbolic language of metaphors is narratively conveyed. By focusing on spatiotemporal metaphors of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia, she maps the storied landscape of Syrian refugee trajectories where religion, identity, and belonging fluctuate between retrospective and future-oriented processes.

In the final chapter in this section, Johannes Bhanye examines the role religion and ritual play in facilitating access to and security over land among migrants in peri-urban Zimbabwe. The chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among Malawians settled in Lydiate, an informal settlement in Zimbabwe's Norton peri-urban area. The study shows that religion- and ritual-based forms of authority—the Nyau cult and witchcraft—while not the only sources of access to and security over land, play a role in matters of land. Migrants turn to the Nyau cult to access and reinforce their ownership of land. Because it is feared and respected by adherents on account of its association with deathly symbols, the occult is able to yield and secure land for those who seek it in its name. Others secure their land against expropriation from fellow migrants through the eccentric means of witchcraft. Migrants do not turn to these alternative forms of authority is not because they prefer it; very often

there are no formal institutions that they can use. The courts and local authorities are often unsympathetic to their interests. Migrant squatter settlements have become dynamic spaces with novel forms of authority regulating access to coveted resources.

In Part Three, entitled *Faith and Faith Actors in Responses to Forced Migration*, Max Niedzwiecki, Mathew Weiner and colleagues, and Katarzyna Durajska showcase actors motivated by faith to respond to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Max Niedzwiecki's chapter is a case study of the LGBT Asylum Task Force, a ministry of Hadwen Park Congregational Church in Worcester, Massachusetts. The Task Force began to form when a gay asylum seeker walked through the parish's doors in 2008 asking for help; since that time, it has provided housing, a welcoming community, and access to wrap-around services to over 210 people from 22 countries. This is a multivocal account that tells the stories of the Task Force and some of its leaders and clients, contextualized in the current literature and in the environment faced by LGBT asylum seekers in the United States.

Mathew Weiner and colleagues, practitioners representing the Office of Religious Life at Princeton University and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, examine the Religion and Resettlement Project, an ongoing project that takes as its central premise the idea that religion is a critical aspect for understanding refugees' mental health and civic lives, fostering civil society, conceptualizing the long-term displacement of refugees, and assisting with their integration.

Finally, Katarzyna Durajska takes a closer look at the response (or rather lack thereof) to the humanitarian emergency at the Polish–Belarussian border. Her essay is rooted in both her volunteer experience at the border and her research about the people helping refugees in Cieszyn, a small border town in southern Poland. Since 2016, Katarzyna has participated in activities supporting refugees, including fact-finding missions, protests, and information campaigns. These activities have given her unprecedented access to the developments at the border. She takes a closer look at the claims of the predominantly Roman Catholic Polish government who posit that they promote Christian values in all of their actions. Additionally, she uses "netnography," online research originating in ethnography, to understand the social interactions between volunteers and refugee advocates in the context of contemporary digital communication.

The volume ends with short conclusions where Elżbieta M. Goździak and Izabella Main explore the way forward to think about religion and forced migration at the crossroads of policy and practice.

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PART I

Politics, Values, and Discourses: Religious and Secular

CHAPTER 2

Contesting Flexible Solidarity: Secular and Religious Support for Refugees in Hungary

Elżbieta M. Goździak

Introduction

By the end of 2015, more than 390,000 mainly Muslim asylum seekers crossed the Serbian–Hungarian border and descended on the Keleti train station in Budapest. Smaller groups of refugees arrived in Debrecen and Pécs (Rokicka, 2021). Viktor Orbán, prime minister of Hungary, did not see refugees fleeing war-torn countries as a humanitarian challenge but rather as a Muslim invasion threatening national security, social cohesion, and the Christian identity of the Hungarian nation (Goździak & Márton, 2018; Goździak, 2019).

The European Union asked Hungary to find homes for 1,294 refugees. Rather than accept the EU's decision, the Hungarian government spent approximately 28 million euros on a xenophobic anti-immigrant

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campaign. The government called on voters to defend Christian values and Hungarian national identity in order to stop Hungary from becoming "a breeding ground for terrorism" (Vékony, 2019).

Furthermore, the Hungarian government's response to the threat allegedly posed by the asylum seekers was to erect a 100-mile-long, four-meter-high, razor-wire-topped fence on Hungary's southern borders with Serbia and Croatia to keep refugees out. Hungarian border police swaggered in pairs alongside the fence in a scene reminiscent of the Cold War, yet, somehow, this was not enough. Hungary recruited 3,000 "border-hunters" to join the 10,000 police and soldiers already patrolling the border (Goździak, 2016).

In September 2015, Hungary amended its Criminal Code to criminalize crossing the closed border, damaging the fence, and obstructing the construction work related to the border closure and to punish any such acts with a three- to ten-year prison sentence. The Act on Criminal Proceedings was also amended with a new fast-track provision to bring the defendants to trial within 15 days of interrogation—or within eight days if caught *in flagrante*. With these new provisions, the Hungarian government declared a "state of crisis due to mass migration" (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019). Between September 2015 and March 2016, 2,353 people were convicted of unauthorized border crossing (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). These people generally remained in immigration detention pending removal to Serbia, which Hungary deemed a safe country to which asylum seekers could return. The Hungarian Helsinki Commission argued that Serbia could not be regarded as a safe third country because it recognized virtually no asylum seekers. Applications for a stay of proceedings referring to the non-penalization principle of the 1951 Convention were systematically dismissed on the grounds that "eligibility for international protection was not a relevant issue to criminal liability" (Gyollai & Amatrudo, 2018). In 2018, the Hungarian parliament outlawed helping migrants to launch asylum claims or apply for residence inside the country. The "Stop Soros" legislation stipulated punishments of up to one year in prison for anyone assisting refugees (Human Right Watch, 2018).

In order to gain the public's support for criminalizing migration and rejecting the European Union's request to admit a few hundred refugees, the Hungarian government organized a national referendum and asked Hungarians a simple question: "Do you want the European

Union to prescribe the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the consent of the National Assembly?".

Voter turnout was only 39 percent, far short of the 50 percent participation required to make the referendum valid under Hungarian law, but Orbán decided that the 3.3 million Hungarians who voted "no" in the referendum spoke for all 10 million Hungarians. The Orbán government feared that the referendum alone would not deter potential asylum seekers from trying to enter Hungary. In order to ensure that the situation from the summer of 2015 would not be repeated, the government began to further strengthen the borders and close existing refugee camps (Goździak, 2019) and called for "flexible solidarity" and emphasized a preference to support refugees in their countries of origin over assistance and settlement in Hungary.

In this chapter, I juxtapose the Hungarian government's call for "flexible solidarity" with grassroots efforts undertaken by different actors to welcome asylum seekers and facilitate their onward journey to European countries, where opportunities for more permanent settlement existed. This chapter is a companion piece to an article I published with Izabella Main on flexible solidarity and grassroots solidarians in Poland (Goździak & Main, 2020). Both texts are part of a larger interdisciplinary research project on secular and religious norms and values in the context of the "refugee crisis."

A description of the field research is followed by a brief discussion of the concepts and frameworks used in this study. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of empirical findings. I begin with a discussion of the *flexible* and *effective* solidarity promoted by the Hungarian government and I show how it created deserving and undeserving refugees. I also present the position of religious leaders toward refugees to show how some attempted to welcome the Stranger (and, unfortunately, failed), while others sided with the Orbán administration to advocate for solidarity abroad. Next, I show how different solidarians representing civil society organizations and informal community networks contested the government's anti-refugee policies. While the civil society actors provided invaluable assistance to asylum seekers, they were not able to affect major policy changes.

Data and Methodology

This chapter is informed by field research in Budapest, Bicske, Vac, and Debrecen. The research was carried out from September to November 2016, in May 2019, and in March 2020. In total, we[1] interviewed 35 solidarians, in some instances more than once. We also interviewed a few asylum seekers, mainly in Bicske, while the camp was still open, and in Budapest. The interviews took a form of individual in-depth ethnographic interviews, but on occasion, we also held focus group discussions with representatives of Hungarian civil society. Additionally, we spoke with several Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant spiritual leaders as well as lay representatives of the Seventh Day Adventists and the Hungarian Reformed Church. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, often with the aid of a Hungarian co-researcher. The solidarians representing civil society were mostly young, highly educated women and men between the ages of 25 and 50, with a predominance of women among the interviewees.

I use narrative analysis to identify themes related to the concept and practice of solidarity and the role of religious and secular motivations in providing assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. "Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that takes story as either its raw data or its product" (Bleakley, 2005, p. 534). Narrative methods have a long tradition in many fields (Eastmond, 2007). In international migration studies, narratives often provide researchers with the only means of learning something about people's lives in times and places to which they have little other access. In this study, personal accounts allowed me to glean the diversity of actions undertaken by different solidarians and spiritual leaders. Narrative analysis, as used in qualitative research, is grounded in the assumption that meaning is ascribed to phenomena by being experienced and that we can only understand people's experiences through the way they express it (Schütz, 1972). In other words, experience gives rise and form to narratives, but is also organized and given meaning in the telling. Thus, analytically, I was able to distinguish between solidarity as lived (the events in solidarians' lives, solidarity as perceived and made sense of (how solidarians see and ascribe meaning to their own actions), solidarity as told (how the experience of solidarity is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience) (Bruner, 2004), and solidarity as text (the researchers' interpretation and representation of the story) (Eastmond, 2007).

Concepts and Frameworks

Two main concepts frame my discussion: solidarity and solidarians. Much has been written about the concepts of solidarity. I do not intend to review the vast theoretical literature on solidarity; others have done it masterfully (see Bauder & Juffs, 2020 for an analysis of the concept in migration literature). However, I do want to briefly mention a few of the analytical frameworks used to analyze different types of solidarity in Hungary during the refugee crisis.

István Grajczjár and colleagues (2021) explored institutionalized solidarity (macro-solidarity, understood as a form of solidarity that is based on the interests of others). They focused on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and on attitudes toward welfare redistribution, in the context of a hybrid regime built by the right-wing populist government led by Victor Orbán and the Fidesz party. They found that the proportion of the Hungarian population promoting inclusive solidarity was the lowest, while the exclusive orientations were highest.

Using the framework of ethnography of immobility, Annastiina Kallius and colleagues analyzed (unexpected) horizontal solidarities, "involving private citizens working with migrants, standing with them in their protests, sheltering people, and transporting them to the western border." They consider these actions horizontal modes of solidarity and juxtapose them with "the reading of the migrant crisis as a problem of state responsibility, and migrants as humanitarian victims lacking agency" (Kallius et al., 2016, p. 27).

Looking at Hungary (and beyond), the contributors to the volume *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe* (Feischmidt et al., 2019) discuss numerous forms of solidarity, shaped by local and national contexts, and new constellations of actors engaged in what they call "vernacular humanitarianism," involving both "local helpers" and "international volunteers." One of the contributors, Celine Cantat (2019), points to the concepts of reciprocity and commonality as the main characteristics of solidarity with refugees in two border towns in Hungary: Szeged and Pécs. Her discussion is situated in the context of the marginalization of migrants and refugees in Hungary.

In this chapter, I focus on solidarity as debated in the context of the "refugee crisis" (e.g., Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; King, 2016; Rygiel, 2011). I use two interrelated concepts of solidarity: (1) solidarity as a value that underpins the actions of different solidarians working with and

on behalf of refugees and (2) solidarity conceptualized as movements that shape a new kind of cosmopolitanism, namely, cosmopolitanism from below (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). Finally, I have also been inspired by anthropological analyses of solidarity (e.g., Lem, 2008; Rakopoulos, 2016; Theodossopoulos, 2016).

I am cognizant of the fact that although solidarity as a value continues to be present in public debates, "its meaning is not very clear and depends on the discussant's intentions" (Petelczyc, 2018, p. 129). The principle of solidarity is also often contested (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Koca, 2016). In contrast with Poland, where civil society members rarely used the word "solidarity" while narrating their involvement with refugees and migrants (Goździak & Main, 2020), Hungarians invoked the concept and its related actions more frequently. There are migrant solidarity groups that use the word in their name, for example, MigSzol Szeged and MigSzol Pécs (Svensson et al., 2017). However, an equal number of people spoke about their desire to support refugees and the need to be hospitable without ever referring to the concept of solidarity.

I use the term "solidarians" to discuss the different actors involved in providing support to migrants and refugees in Hungary. As Rozakou (2018) observed, the word "solidarian" is a neologism resulting from an interesting grammatical–ontological shift that has occurred in Greece, where the adjective solidarian (alliléggios) has become a noun signifying a person (not just the action) who is in solidarity with somebody else. Rozakou argues that this grammatical modification denotes a radicalization of solidarity in the social spaces where it is being practiced.

In Greece, the word solidarians is used to differentiate between activists helping refugees who were arriving in the country during the summers of 2015 and 2016 and employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who also became key actors in the humanitarian relief efforts. Arundhati Roy makes a similar argument when she talks about the NGOization of resistance (Roy, 2014). Many solidarians do not define their activities in terms of "service" to "beneficiaries" the way NGO workers do. Rather, they promote and adhere to the principles of egalitarian and empowering relatedness. They talk about "sociality as a rehumanizing process" (Rozakou, 2016, p. 194).

While the concept of solidarity was invoked in Hungary, the term "solidarians" was rarely used. Actors standing in solidarity with refugees and migrants referred to themselves as "helpers" and "volunteers." These

terms were used by both ordinary citizens who felt compelled to assist the asylum seekers and representatives of NGOs.

In summary, I understand solidarity as practices that expand the sense of community, move beyond borders, and are produced mainly at the local level (see Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019), and solidarians as actors coming from all walks of life motivated to support refugees and migrants.

Promoting Flexible Solidarity

At an informal meeting in Bratislava on September 16, 2017, the leaders of the Visegrád Four (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Czech Republic) issued a joint statement emphasizing that migration policy should be based on the principle of "flexible solidarity," framed as an ability to decide on specific forms of contributing to a solution for the "refugee crisis." The Visegrád statement suggested that member states ought to be able to contribute to the refugee relocation program in various forms and to express their "flexible" and "voluntary" solidarity with the ongoing refugee crisis (Ardittis, 2016; see also Płomecka & Stankiewicz, 2016). The notion of "flexibly solidarity" was later augmented by "effective solidarity," with its emphasis on solutions leading to effective protection of the EU's external borders (Frelak Seges, 2017).

Furthermore, the Hungarian government argued that to settle the refugee crisis, the international community should provide humanitarian aid in the countries of crisis. Most importantly, the Hungarian government argued that the country cannot accept any non-Christian (i.e., Muslim) asylum seekers, because Europe should remain Christian. In order to accomplish this goal, the Orbán government established a ministerial office focused on defending Christianity and Christians, including Christians in the Middle East. In an interview, a young representative of that office, whom I call Imad,[2] spoke at length about the incompatibility of Muslim lifestyle and worldview with European values. He said, "I awaken Hungarians to the difficulties in living alongside Muslims."[3] He also talked about the danger of Muslims bringing their families to Europe. In his opinion, "changing the demographics is part of a major Islamic plan." Although this young man, born to an ethnic Hungarian mother and a Lebanese father, was not keen on welcoming Syrian refugees in Hungary, in 2015, he offered his services as an Arabic interpreter to the local Caritas, a Catholic charity.

Speaking about his professional work, Imad said that "Europeans are looking at Syrians as a cheap labor force, but my office is trying to help them at home to keep them in Syria." Apparently, the Hungarian government provided two million forints (approximately $5,600) to the Catholic Archdiocese in Syria for the reconstruction of homes destroyed by ISIS. Imad said that this relatively small amount of money helped some 4,000 people, while assistance to the 1,200 refugees (the EU quota) would cost much more.

As part of the "solidarity abroad" efforts, the Hungarian government also established a scholarship scheme for Christians from majority-Muslim countries. The scholarship recipients can pursue their studies in Hungary in English. Imad thought that studying in English instead of Hungarian would ensure that they leave Hungary after graduation. He mentioned that before the transformation, many foreign students from Bangladesh, Iraq, and Yemen studied Hungarian prior to embarking on engineering or medical studies. "Unfortunately, most stayed. They married here and stayed. Studying in English now gives them a *better chance to go back*" (emphasis added). In other words, the Hungarian government is doing everything possible to prevent local settlement. Ironically, Imad's own father came to Hungary from Lebanon to study. He married a Hungarian woman and stayed.

Imad wholeheartedly agreed with Orbán's approach to Muslim refugees. He said, "I'm still a Fidesz voter because there is no better. We do whatever Orban says because he is a charismatic leader," Imad added. Imad also emphasized that "Orbán uses religion to define the nation."

Orbán's religious conversion is quite remarkable. An atheist when he entered politics in the 1980s, he now calls himself a defender of Christianity. At the opening of the 2nd Conference on Christian persecution in 2019, Orbán said that "the Hungarian people and their government believe that Christian virtues provide peace and happiness to those who practice them." He also noted that protecting Hungary's constitutional identity and Christian culture was an obligation for each state agency under Hungary's fundamental law. "This legacy obliges us to protect Christian communities persecuted across the world as far as we are able," he said (Hungary Today, 2019).

The focus on "solidarity abroad" meant that the border was closed to new asylum seekers and little was done for the few asylum seekers who had come to Hungary before 2015. Beginning in December 2016, Viktor Orbán closed most refugee camps, including the camp in Bicske.

When I visited the camp a few days before it closed, 75 individuals hailing from Cuba, Nigeria, Cameroon, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan lived there. When the camp in Bicske closed, the refugees were relocated to Kiskunhalas, in southern Hungary. The Bicske camp's location offered its residents access to a variety of educational and recreational activities, which helped them adjust to life in Hungary. Some refugees commuted to Budapest in order to attend classes at Central European University (CEU) or language courses provided by NGOs. Bicske residents attended events and met with Hungarian mentors from groups such as Artemisszió, a multicultural foundation, and MigSzol, a migrant advocacy group. Christian refugees were bused to an American church each Sunday morning. Moving the residents to Kiskunhalas has deprived them of these opportunities.

Deserving and Undeserving Refugees

The Hungarian government continued to endorse "flexible solidarity" until white Christian refugees needed assistance. In 2019, Hungary accepted 300 refugees of Hungarian origin from Venezuela. The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta led the resettlement effort. The refugees had to prove some level of Hungarian ancestry in order to qualify for the resettlement scheme.[4]

According to Hungarian law, everyone who can prove Hungarian ancestry is entitled to citizenship. As Hungarian legal scholar Edit Frenyó said, "of course process is key, meaning political and administrative will is needed for successful naturalization." According to media reports, the Venezuelan refugees received free airfare, residency and work permits, temporary housing, job placement, and English and Hungarian language courses (Stone, 2019). In the eyes of the authorities and the general public, they deserved these services. In the official narrative—an ethnonational story of homecoming—they were presented as Hungarians, not refugees. As Gergely Gulyás, Chancellor of the Republic of Hungary, declared: "We are talking about Hungarians; Hungarians are not considered migrants" (Reuters, 2019). Frenyó posits that the Hungarian government must present the refugees as Hungarians seeking to come home in order to avert political backlash and to ensure that the controversial tax law imposed on groups that "support immigration" is not levied on the Malta Order. At least one commentator referred to this situation as "Magyar abszurd" [Hungarian absurd].

Let's fast-forward to February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. The Visegrád Four offered immediate assistance to Ukrainians fleeing the war. Lydia Gall of the Human Right Watch reported that

> at the Hungary–Ukraine border last week and at one of Budapest's main railway stations, I was struck by the enormous outpouring of solidarity from local communities and volunteers helping tens of thousands of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Hungarians have to date [March 2022] welcomed more than 180,000 refugees from Ukraine with open arms (Gall, 2022).

Gall was impressed by the volunteer and charity organizations trying to provide humanitarian relief to those fleeing Ukraine, but indicated that it was less clear what the Hungarian government was doing.

A week after Russia's invasion, Viktor Orbán traveled to the border town of Beregsurány to meet Ukrainian refugees. Speaking to reporters, he said that "Hungary is a good friend of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. If they need any help, … they can count on us" (Egan, 2022). There is no clear evidence of what concrete steps the Hungarian government has taken or plans to take in order to aid Ukrainians seeking refuge. One thing, however, is clear: As with the Hungarian Venezuelans, the white and Christian Ukrainians are deemed deserving of help. The brown and non-Christian refugees from the Middle East continue to be unworthy of assistance.

The categorization of refugees as deserving and undeserving is not new. Migration scholars have written extensively about this issue (Marchetti, 2020; Sales, 2002). The deservingness of immigrants is often framed in different and sometimes contradictory ways (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014). For forced migrants (refugees or victims of human trafficking), vulnerability and victimhood have been major criteria of deservingness, but as Sophie Hinger (2020) argues, other framings—such as economic performance or cultural deservingness—also play a role. Cultural and/or religious closeness was definitely a factor in Hungary's decision to assist both Hungarians from Venezuela and Ukrainians.

Across Europe, there are vast differences regarding the perceived deservingness of different groups. While elderly people are seen as the most deserving, immigrant groups are found to be the least deserving (Van Oorschot, 2006). Among asylum seekers and refugees, women and children have always been considered deserving of assistance. We all

remember the heart-wrenching moment when the body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach. The image of the little boy went viral and created an understanding of the humanitarian crisis. The image "led media to upgrade the ongoing 'migrant situation' to a 'refugee crisis'" (Mattus, 2020, p. 51). Petra Molar (2016) described the image of Kurdi as a "macabre catalyst for progressive change." On the other hand, photographs of young Kurdish men at the Keleti station posted on social media and published in newspapers were met with outrage; many Hungarians thought that young, able-bodied men should be fighting back in Syria, not seeking asylum in Europe.

Nevertheless, in some circles in Hungary, there were people ready to step up and assist asylum seekers. Some failed to attract followers, despite their best intentions, but others successfully managed to recruit volunteers and develop grass-root assistance networks. I discuss them next.

Religious Leaders' Attempts to Welcome the Stranger

While Hungarian politicians vehemently rejected the idea of accepting non-Christian refugees, some religious leaders endeavored to set an example of welcoming the Stranger. Miklós Beer, the now retired Catholic Bishop of Vác, housed refugees in his rectory. "Pope Francis said that refugees are our brothers. In the Bible, Jesus said: 'When I was a refugee myself, you took me in.' You cannot understand this message in any other way." Beer was disappointed over the apathy of other clergy and members of his congregation and their reluctance to follow in his footsteps. They chose to believe the hateful and intimidating messages broadcasted by state media. He commented on people's irresponsiveness and hostility, saying, "What makes me sad is that they want to protect Christianity and yet they reject refugees. So, what is it that makes us Christians?" While most of the Hungarian Catholic clergy ignored Bishop Beer, his friend, Lutheran Bishop Tamas Fabiny, joined him in recording a video message about the importance of welcoming the Stranger. They recorded the message at the invitation of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017).

There were also several other members of the Hungarian clergy who responded positively to Pope Francis's call. Péter Mustó, a Jesuit priest, and Csaba Böjte, a Franciscan monk, stressed the importance of the message of humanitarian responsibility toward refugees. István Bogárdi

Szabó, the Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church's Synod, called for the expansion of the Refugee Mission. Péter Ganec, a Lutheran Bishop, visited one of the refugee camps and called for compassion and assistance to refugees (Barcsa & Máté-Tóth, 2016).

Others, however, thought it was not their responsibility. The Hungarian Baptists believed that it was more important to invest in helping refugees in their countries of origin than providing assistance in Hungary. Leaders of several Hungarian Jewish communities publicly empathized with the persecution faced by Muslim refugees, but called on governments of rich Arab countries to step up and help. They also emphasized the need for strict control of immigration, but maintained that the decision should be in the hands of the Hungarian government (Barcsa et al., 2019).

The Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference admitted the seriousness of the situation and assured the public that Caritas Hungarica was looking for effective ways to help refugees, but also stressed that countries have both a right and a duty to protect their citizens. The bishops also indicated their serious concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East (Barcsa & Máté-Tóth, 2016).

Contesting Flexible Solidarity

In contrast to the government's anti-refugee policies of recent years and the religious leadership's less than stellar attitude toward refugees, different solidarians hailing both from civil society organizations and informal community networks offered assistance to refugees seeking safe haven in Hungary or safe passage to other countries in the European Union. It is difficult to categorize these solidarians and their actions, as their missions and activities often overlap, but I will attempt to provide a preliminary taxonomy. I have used a range of characteristics and research questions to devise the taxonomy. I looked at the relationship between particular groups of solidarians and the Hungarian government, the types of organization (formal NGOs or informal networks; faith-based or secular initiatives), and the types of action.

Spontaneous Expressions of Solidarity

We witnessed, heard about, and talked to representatives of numerous spontaneously created networks of volunteers whose efforts started in the

early summer of 2015. A Facebook photographic diary, *Budapest Seen*, documented many ordinary citizens stopping by the Keleti train station to drop off food, toys, and diapers. Doctors and nurses were seen providing medical assistance. Young volunteers were spotted playing with children. These acts of solidarity were often expressed at the individual level; people acted of their own volition, motivated by a variety of factors: empathy, secular ethical values, as well as religious values.

In addition to individual solidarians, there were also spontaneously created networks of volunteers and advocates. In this study, I have looked closely at two such networks: one in Debrecen and one in Budapest. Both were established through social media connections, primarily Facebook. The leader in Debrecen, whom I call Éva, sent a mass message to her Facebook friends indicating that the asylum seekers arriving in Debrecen needed to be fed and hydrated. Within an hour, her friends were setting up tables at the station while others were preparing trays of sandwiches. Later on, volunteers assisted refugees in buying train tickets to continue their journey to Austria, since the Hungarian government was adamant that nobody would be able to settle in the country.

The students at the University of Debrecen also got involved. A large group of foreign-born students attend the university, including Arabic-speaking students. Marta, a Yemeni Hungarian medical doctor, alerted her two sons, who speak fluent Arabic and study at the university, to the needs of the incoming asylum seekers. Students volunteered to serve as interpreters, and some even donated money to purchase train tickets for the refugees traveling to Austria. Krisztina, a trained psychotherapist, communicated with other volunteers through a private Facebook page called MigAid 2015.

The network in Budapest operated on similar principles. Volunteers provided assistance—food, money, or train tickets—and coordinated itineraries. They worked both at the Keleti and Nyugati train stations. Some of the volunteers in Budapest were previously involved with Amnesty International. Zsuza, who has many connections to Scotland, managed to mobilize donations—financial and material—from her Scottish friends and patrons of a Scottish pub in Budapest.

These volunteer networks were led primarily by women. Éva said that

> women know what to do when the world around them is falling apart. They can face any challenge that comes their way. I didn't need to instruct them what kind of food to prepare to meet the dietary requirement of

> Muslim refugees. They knew Muslims don't eat pork. They coordinated everything seamlessly.

Éva appreciated the help men provided, but joked that they had neither leadership skills nor common sense:

> My husband and many other men whom we recruited to help were willing to step up to the plate, but they had to be told exactly what to do. They had no clue how to arrange tables holding food and water to facilitate a smooth queue.

The groups in Debrecen and Budapest did not seek to formalize their activities. However, other networks, such as MigSzol Szeged and MigSzol Pécs, did establish a more formal NGO connected to the national-level action group. Unlike the Budapest-based MigSzol, which worked with migrants and other vulnerable groups (the disabled and the Roma), MigSzol Szeged and MigSzol Pécs focused solely on asylum seekers (see Svensson et al., 2017).

The groups in Debrecen, Budapest, Szeged, and Pécs

> in a surprisingly short span of time … managed to formulate a wide agenda and significantly raise public awareness and obtain influence. The role and weight of these grassroots organizations in public life was widely magnified in an already highly politicized atmosphere, as their activities … sharply contrasted with the anti-immigration message of the government (Bernát, 2019, p. 5).

Established Secular Charity and Aid Organizations

While the civil society in Hungary is not as robust as in other countries, there are several established charities and aid organizations, both secular and faith-based. Menedék (Hungarian Association for Migrants) and Migration Aid are examples of secular organizations. Menedék was established in the 1990s, at the height of the Balkan wars. In 2015, with the support of the UNHCR, Menedék established an emergency response team that provided counseling, information, and material support to some 14,000 refugees. After the closure of the border with Serbia, and later the Hungary–Croatia border, members of the emergency response team continued monitoring transit zones and making daily visits to Tompa, Röszke, Beremend, Barcs, Zákány, Letenye, and Lenti. They also worked

in three detention facilities in Nagyfa, Martonvásár, and Vác as well as a child protection center in Hódmezővásárhely that provided psycho-social services (personal communication).

In 2015, Migration Aid based its operations in Budapest and had an online membership of 10,000 in closed Facebook groups. The closed groups tied to particular locations usually had a few thousand members, such as those of Migration Aid dedicated to the three largest Budapest train stations (Bernát, 2019). The Migration Aid volunteers focused on children. They brought toys and sweets for the refugee children camping at Keleti and turned the station into a playground during the afternoons. However, when Migration Aid volunteers started to use chalk to draw colorful pictures on the asphalt as a creative means of helping children deal with their trauma, the Hungarian police reminded the volunteers that the children could be made liable for "violating public order." In contrast to civil society's engagement with children, the Hungarian government tried to undermine and limit public sympathy toward refugees. Hungarian state television employees were told not to broadcast images of refugee children. Ultimately, the task of visually capturing the everyday life of refugee families and their children, as the only means to bridge the distance between the refugees and the societies receiving them, was left to volunteers and Facebook activists.

The narratives surrounding the activities of established charities, especially those that received government funding, are difficult to disentangle. Some established charity organizations apparently "held that the social work done on the streets by non-professionals (mostly) was not professional and excessive in relation to the number of migrants" (Bernát, 2019, p. 5). Representatives of some established charitable organizations argued that in order to avoid superfluous aid to asylum seekers, they would be marginally involved in the relief work. Many of our interlocutors mentioned seeing representatives of established charities "in their fancy vests with prominently displayed logos, just standing around and doing nothing." Iványi Gábor, the leader of the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood, talked at length about the apathy of the "official helpers" who did not want to provide latrines for the refugees gathered at Keleti saying that "if the refugees need toilets, they should go to Austria; there are plenty of toilets there."

Faith-Based Networks

Magyar Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet (Hungarian Interchurch Aid), the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBAid) are examples of well-established faith-based organizations. All have had the blessing of the government, although they have been rather silent on the issue of government funding. When I spoke with a representative of Ökumenikus in the fall of 2016, she talked at length about the assistance the organization had provided to refugees in 2015, both at the border and in the interior of Hungary. Ökumenikus had the support of the government; Anikó Lévai, Viktor Orbán's wife, volunteered with the organization. It is hard to say whether this was a one-off photo opportunity or genuine solidarity with refugees. When the government criminalized assistance to asylum seekers and migrants, all references to the organization's activities with and on behalf of refugees disappeared from their website. Today, they are back in business, assisting Ukrainians displaced by the Russian invasion.

ADRA is part of a large international network operating in 118 countries. It was founded in 1956 in Maryland, USA, and has access to international donors. When we interviewed a staff person of ADRA Hungary, he indicated that they wanted to scale up their activities. The conversation took place as refugee camps were being closed, borders strengthened, and assistance to undocumented migrants criminalized. These events seriously limited their ability to provide assistance to migrants. However, I also had the impression that the expansion of services was very much related to (1) the agency's endorsement of the government's focus on humanitarianism abroad and (2) the opportunity to develop an overseas program. The latter seemed to have been tied with the mission to recruit converts.

Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBAid), another faith-based institution, was heavily involved in the migrant crisis of 2015. HBAid had their own staff and volunteers at Nyugati train station. HBAid offered medical assistance, a mobile baby-bathing unit, and food packages. Once the government restricted the entry process for migrants, HBAid moved their operation to Serbia and Croatia.

The involvement of the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood in the migration crisis was quite different. The Brotherhood, established in the 1970s when a group of young theologians split from the Methodist church, is an example of religion meeting political opposition. As Iványi Gábor said, "for over 40 years we have been in opposition—first against

the communist regime, then we were expelled from the Methodist church and recognized as a new denomination, but now with Fidesz introducing authoritarian practices, we are again forced to be the opposition."

At the time when social work was forbidden in Hungary, the Brotherhood established *Funds for the Poor* to assist the Roma. In an interview, Iványi Gábor, talked about the role of a samizdat periodical called *Beszélő*, meaning "speaker" and "visiting hours in jail" that was first published in 1981. In 1988, the Brotherhood assisted ethnic Hungarians and Romanians fleeing the Ceaușescu regime. They were also involved when Yugoslavia fell apart and people were fleeing en masse.

They are registered as a charity organization, but they operate very much as a spontaneous network of volunteers. When asked whether they collaborate with other faith-based groups, Gábor said that

> many churches are not willing to cooperate because then they too would be perceived as the opposition. We can collaborate with certain people, but not with churches as institutions. I have some very good friends among Catholic bishops and Catholic abbots, and we work together—but as individuals.

Human Rights Organizations

While there are several organizations working on human rights issues, many advocate for the Roma or LGBTQ populations and are not focused on refugees and migrants. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) is an exception. Founded in 1989, the HHC has been providing access to effective, free-of-charge legal counselling and representation to persons in need of international protection. They also regularly comment on draft asylum and immigration legislation and analyze legal practices. They continued their legal counseling services during the refugee crisis. When we last spoke with HHC in March 2020, they were still going strong despite the passage of the "Stop Soros" legislation in June 2018, criminalizing assistance to asylum seekers. Representatives of the HHC and Amnesty International indicated that criminalizing essential and legitimate human rights work was a brazen attack on people seeking safe haven from persecution and those who assist them. The HHC representative we interviewed emphasized that the new law was a new low point in the crackdown on civil society. The organization vowed to resist the law every step of the way.

International Organizations

Several international organizations were present in Hungary during the summer of 2015. Among them were the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The UNHCR, along with the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), called on Hungary to refrain from policies and practices that promote intolerance, fear, and xenophobia against refugees and migrants. To mark World Refugee Day on June 20, 2015, the UNHCR's regional office in Budapest prepared a set of billboards showcasing refugees who have successfully integrated into Hungarian society. The UNHCR's poster campaign followed closely on the heels of the Hungarian government's own controversial nationwide billboard campaign, which warned migrants to obey the law and not to take jobs away from Hungarians. Many Hungarians enjoyed the dialogue between the two sets of posters; several of my Hungarian friends pointed me toward lively discussions on social media sparked by the campaigns.

IOM was present at all the different assistance centers, but was often criticized by civil society volunteers for "peddling its brand and doing very little." A representative of IOM told us that he very much regretted that the organization had withdrawn as soon as the government criminalized giving assistance to migrants. "We should have stayed longer," he said. Stopping assistance to asylum seekers contradicted what Magdalena Majkowska-Tomkin, head of the Hungary office of the IOM, told Reuters on September 15, 2015: "From my perspective Hungary needs to respect its international obligations and allow people to claim asylum and provide facilities for them that are adequate for their condition." Majkowska-Tomkin said the IOM saw room for a legal challenge to the new rules, but in the end, the organization did not challenge the decision of the Hungarian government.

In Conclusion

Asylum seekers arriving in Hungary in 2015 entered a country characterized by widespread xenophobia, a high level of mistrust, and a relatively limited history of solidarity with forced migrants (Bernát et al., 2019). The government exploited this state of affairs and pressed what Gerő and Sik (2020) called the moral panic button, an institutionalized

form of fearmongering regarding the threat of migration and a worldwide conspiracy against Hungary that successfully streamlined intolerant thinking among the majority of Hungarian society and dissolved values such as solidarity.

Despite the hostile environment, a number of solidarians emerged and through their actions contested the government's attitudes toward asylum seekers. The number and diversity of civil society networks and organizations formed during the "refugee crisis" were impressive and very much appreciated by the asylum seekers transitioning through Hungary. Many of the networks continue to support migrants. Currently, most are assisting Ukrainians, but some also work with the Roma. However, their influence on immigration and integration policymaking vis-à-vis asylum seekers and migrants from non-European countries has been non-existent. This is not surprising. The Hungarian civil society actors have not yet formed powerful political advocacy akin to the politically minded NGOs operating in major refugee resettlement countries. The continued xenophobia of the current government does not bode well for policy changes in the near future.

Notes

1. I use the pronoun "we" because I conducted this research with the assistance of Izabela Kujawa, Vera Juhasz, and Péter Márton. I would like to express my appreciation for their involvement in this study.
2. All the names are pseudonyms.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from our interviews.
4. About 5,000 Hungarians emigrated to Venezuela in the twentieth century, mostly after World War II and in 1956.

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CHAPTER 3

Thou Shalt Not Deport? Religious Ethical Discourse and the Politics of Asylum in Poland and Israel

Agnieszka Bielewska and Nir Cohen

Introduction

In May 2012, following a violent anti-migrant demonstration in Tel Aviv, Yair Lapid, Member of the Knesset, representing the centrist secular Yesh Atid party, declared that while he fully supported the deportation of African asylum seekers, he was convinced that the Israeli state has an obligation to take care of its own citizens first: "I support the arrest and deportation of infiltrators…and preventing their entry to Israel…I think

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human rights organizations should first consider the rights of the [Israeli] residents of Southern Tel Aviv, because the poor people of your city come first" (Somfalvi, 2012).

In 2015, the then Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz of the *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform) party, agreed to accept Middle Eastern asylum seekers as part of the European Union's relocation scheme. The leaders of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) party criticized her decision and argued that Muslims pose a threat to Christianity (see Kaczyński's speech at Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2015). Supporters of asylum seekers, on the other hand, invoked the Good Samaritan parable to justify pro-asylum policies (see Grupiński's speech at Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2015). A few months after the 2015 election, which brought the nationalist Law and Justice party to power, the new Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, put the agreement on hold, claiming that the relocation proposed by the EU threatened Poland's national security. She argued that there could be ISIS fighters and terrorists among asylum seekers (Stolarczyk, 2017). As a result, Poland accepted no asylum seekers. The fact that most asylum seekers were Muslim was an important part of the Polish debate.

These attitudes toward asylum seekers are not unique to Israel and Poland. Indeed, as migrants continue to seek refuge in the Global North, public debates on refugees become increasingly embedded within a religious ethics framework. Public figures—both "admissionists" and "restrictionists"—regularly invoke religious principles to advocate for more-or less-tolerant refugee and asylum policies (Randell-Moon, 2006).

In contrast to studies that use religious ethics to make a normative case for a more compassionate migration policy, in this chapter we explore the use of religious ethical narratives to support both admissionist and restrictionist approaches toward asylum seekers. By drawing on the cases of Israel and Poland, we examine how religious narratives are mobilized to advocate policies for or against the admission and settlement of asylum seekers. Specifically, we show how politicians construct religious narratives to further their pro- or anti-asylum policies commensurate with their political orientations. In doing so, we reveal the malleable nature of religious ethics and its political instrumentalization.

Scholarly interest in the linkages between religious ethics and international migration is hardly new (Plaut, 1996). Indeed, students of migration and religion have long offered Judeo-Christian scriptural interpretations of desired migration policies in Western societies. Plaut (1996,

pp. 24–25), for example, argues that "[From the point of view of Jewish tradition], the ultimate imperative lies with the injunction to treat strangers like the native-born and to open…our borders to them so that they can find a new and sustainable existence." Heyer (2014, p. 725), similarly posits that "[A]n approach rooted in…Catholic commitments must both reduce the need to migrate and protect those who find themselves compelled to do so as a last resort." However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored how religious ethical principles are employed in contemporary political discourse. To begin filling this gap, the current chapter investigates the ways in which religious ethical principles are politicized in national migration discourses. Looking at Israel and Poland, we analyze the ways political actors in both countries use religious principles to legitimize public policies toward asylum seekers.

At a first glance, Israel and Poland may seem like an odd choice. Yet, despite obvious differences—geographical location and population makeup—both countries share similar characteristics. First, they are signatories to the Geneva Convention and Protocol on the Status of Refugees, obligated to admit asylum seekers. In addition, a heated public debate on asylum policies, where religious ethics featured prominently, occurred recently in both countries. The Israeli debate emerged as large numbers of asylum seekers, primarily from Sudan and Eritrea, had entered the country (2007–2012) (Cohen & Margalit, 2015). Poland engaged in Islamophobic discourses despite the absence of asylum seekers (Jaskułowski, 2019; Krzyżanowski, 2018). In both countries citizenship is based on blood relationships (*jus sanguinis*). Both Poland and Israel maintain a strong relationship between the state and the (institutionalized) religion, Catholicism or (Orthodox) Judaism, respectively. Finally, narratives of national victimization remain dominant in both countries. Jews, who make up the religious majority in Israel, were persecuted and murdered in the millions by Nazi Germany. Poland was occupied by both Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union. The victimization narrative is prevalent in both countries and it is present also in the political debate that unfolded over asylum policies.

This chapter includes four parts. First, we provide a brief methodological note and necessary background on the perceived migration crises in Poland and in Israel. We then analyze the political discourses in both countries during the peak years of the crisis: 2010–2011 and 2015–2017 in Israel and Poland, respectively. Drawing on secondary data, we show how liberal politicians used religious ethical narratives to advocate for

more open asylum policies, whereas conservative statesmen used them to promote restrictive asylum policies. Accompanied by historical narratives of victimization, the result was a bifurcated discourse, in which religious ethical arguments were selectively used to promote a particular political agenda. We conclude the chapter by drawing key lessons about ways in which ethical religious arguments continue to influence contemporary asylum policies and discourses.

Methods

This chapter is based on critical analysis of state discourses about the admission, integration, and removal of asylum seekers in Israel and Poland. We used two sources of data: (1) National newspapers and online news services from 2015 to 2017 in Poland (e.g., *Rzeczpospolita*, *naTemat*, and *Wirtualna Polska*) and 2010–2011 in Israel (e.g., *Ha'Aretz* and *Yediot Acharonot*); (2) Transcripts of pertinent parliamentary speeches in both countries: in Israel, different Knesset Committee meetings (e.g., Committee of the Interior) and in Poland, protocols of various Parliamentary sessions (e.g., September 16, 2015). We limited our analysis to statements made by local and national politicians, religious leaders, and other elected figures. The statements had to reference at least one religious principle to rationalize a specific policy. We used open coding to identify pertinent themes (Saldaña, 2021). Each author analyzed and interpreted collected data separately, but we discussed our findings to ensure analytical coherence and credibility.

A Brief Chronology of the Asylum Debate in Poland and Israel

In contrast to many European countries, refugees were not a topic of national interest in post-1989 Poland (Krzyżanowski, 2018; Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2016). It surfaced for the first time in mid-2015, following the calculated political strategy of the Law and Justice party (PiS), which used the European "migration crisis" to launch an anti-refugee campaign in the period preceding the parliamentary election.

In May 2015, the European Union suggested resettling 40,000 refugees across EU member states. In July 2015, the Polish Prime Minster, Ewa Kopacz (Civic Platform party), committed to admitting 2000 refugees. PiS exploited the situation to promote anti-refugee

rhetoric. The anti-refugee stance was later adopted by other Polish populist movements (Krzyżanowski, 2018; Pędziwiatr, 2015). Consequently, refugees began to be equated with Muslims posing a threat to Polish society and its "traditional family values" (Goździak & Márton, 2018). On September 16, 2015, the Polish Parliament debated the issue of refugee admissions. The Prime Minister assured Poles that their country would admit very few refugees. On May 16, 2016, the new Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, declared Poland would not admit any refugees. Though Poland is a signatory to the Geneva Convention and its Protocol (since 1991) and an EU member (since 2004), PiS was not willing to grant entry to even a few refugees. It should be noted that PiS' election campaign was backed up by the Polish Catholic Church, which despite Pope Francis' encouragement to help refugees, presented a wide range of attitudes. Some priests and bishops vehemently opposed the Pope and their position did not change even when Archbishop Wojciech Polak threatened to suspend priests participating in anti-refugee manifestations (Cekiera, 2018).

Interestingly, the heated public debate corresponded neither with the number of asylum seekers arriving in Poland nor with the number of Muslims living there. Between 2007 and 2018, a total of 107,187 people applied for refugee status in Poland. However, only 12,734 asylum seekers were permitted to stay in the country (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców, 2020). None of them were part of the European relocation scheme. The Polish Islamophobia occurred without Muslims. Around 2000 Muslim Tatars whose ancestors settled in Poland in the fourteenth century live in north-eastern Poland. Another 15,000–40,000 Muslims arrived in different ways in the last 50 years accounting for 0.1% of the Polish population (Goździak & Márton, 2018).

In Israel, non-Jewish migration is not a new phenomenon. Large numbers of labor migrants began to arrive in the late 1980s. As temporary migrants, allowed to stay in the country for 63 months, they seldom elicited strong political reactions (Kemp & Raijman, 2008). In contrast, asylum seekers who began arriving in large numbers in 2007, instantaneously sparked a heated debate. Unlike labor migrants, they were a largely homogenous group of mostly young, Black males who were, initially, unemployed and homeless (Cohen & Margalit, 2015). Despite a host of measures to curtail their entry and restrict their internal mobility and settlement, their numbers soared. By the end of 2009, nearly 21,000 asylum seekers, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, resided in Israel. The next

two years have witnessed a record number of irregular migrants, with 14,642 and 17,190 new arrivals, respectively (Population and Immigration Authority, 2022). The securitization of the Israeli-Egyptian border slowed down new arrivals in 2012 (10,300). The "Infiltrators" Law of 2013 all but stopped irregular migration from Africa to Israel. In the years since, only a handful of asylum seekers have entered the country through the Sinai Peninsula.

The data analyzed in this chapter concern primarily the years 2010–2012, widely considered the peak years of Israel's irregular migration "crisis." During this period, a political debate over the desired national policy toward asylum seekers unfolded in the Knesset. While liberal politicians advocated a carefully crafted national policy that would guarantee migrants a wide array of rights, including the right to asylum, conservative politicians demanded their incarceration and, subsequently, removal. Interestingly, just like in Poland, both groups regularly employed religious ethical principles as a means to advocate for their preferred asylum policy. In what follows we analyze these narratives, first in Poland and then in Israel.

Religious Ethics and the Politics of Migration in Israel and Poland

When discussing migration policy, students of religious ethics typically focus on two theoretical concepts: hospitality and neighborliness (Schaab, 2008; Yanklowitz, 2019). Hospitality means welcoming strangers as God's messengers or God himself (Pohl, 2006). Neighborliness indicates solidarity with people close to us and distant ones (O'Neil, 2007). Religious ethics scholars argue that these concepts should be the basis for an ethical migration policy in Western societies. However, the public debates both in Israel and Poland do not relate to hospitality. Instead, they center on love of thy neighbor, on one side of the political spectrum, and preferential treatment of one's own group (Christianity's "ordo caritatis" and Judaism's "the poor people of your city come first"), on the other end of the spectrum.

Scholarship on religious ethics typically conceives of Christianity and Judaism as institutional frameworks promoting fair and just treatment of migrants, especially the undocumented (Ahn, 2013). However, as the analyses of public discourses show, politicians in both Poland and Israel have not always used religious narratives to advocate pro-asylum policies.

Rather, some have mobilized religious arguments to do the exact opposite, making strong anti-asylum claims. In Israel, with few exceptions, the majority of politicians opposed granting asylum to incoming Africans, advocating instead their (voluntary or forced) removal from the country. However, since the majority of asylum seekers were citizens of countries that were, at the time, either infamous for human rights' violations (Eritrea) or had underwent prolonged civil wars (Sudan), removal was seldom a viable option. Public discourses therefore focused on whether migrants should receive rights at all, and if so—what kind. Meanwhile, Poland witnessed a fierce political debate between those who were willing to accept asylum seekers and those who rejected the possibility. Not surprisingly, both sides resorted to Christian teachings to support their stance. In the following sections, we illustrate how religion was used simultaneously to argue for and against admission and just treatment of refugees.

Thou Shalt Love Thy Foreigner: Neighborliness and Pro-Asylum Policy

The principle of neighborliness is part of the religious tradition of both Judaism and Christianity. In the Old Testament, the book of Leviticus contains the following commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19: 18). Later, in the New Testament, Jesus invokes neighborliness as the most important commandment (Mark 12: 31). In the Catholic tradition, the idea of "neighbor" is further developed in the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29–37) and Judgment Day (Matthew 25: 3–46) parables. The Good Samaritan is a story about a Jewish traveler who was beaten and left on the side of the road by his co-ethnics. He was saved by a Samaritan, even though Samaritans and Jews were in conflict at the time. The Judgment Day parable depicts a day when Jesus rewards those who helped others; "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was ill and you cared for me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25: 35–36).

Drawing on these religious sentiments, neighborliness and the love of a neighbor (or "foreigner" or "stranger"), featured prominently in the public discourses of both countries. Politicians from the center/left, often used it to advocate for the admission and fair treatment of asylum seekers. Many stated that a humane approach toward them is in line with

Christian or Jewish values; they hoped to appeal to more traditional and conservative constituencies.

In Poland, the presence of the Christian ethic in public debate is not surprising. Historically, religion was important for the preservation of the Polish culture during the partitions, wars, and communism. Following the 1989 transformation, the Catholic Church expected to hold a special position in society and receive legal and political privileges (Żuk & Żuk, 2019). At the same time, the Polish society with its lack of secular traditions was confronted with Western European postmodern values (Inglehart, 1997). The conflict between secularity and individualization (with its support of feminism and LGBTQI rights), on the one hand, and traditionalist and religious values (especially traditional family values and gender roles), on the other hand, entered public political, social, and religious debates.

The current relationship between the Catholic Church and the Law and Justice party is credited with PiS' victory in recent parliamentary elections. However, despite proclaiming Christian values, few PiS politicians embraced New Testament principles when discussing refugee policy. The exception was John Abraham Godson, an MP representing the Polish People's Party (center conservative). A Nigerian by birth, he identified himself and other members of the Parliament as "disciples of Christ":

> [Let us] begin to truly believe and be disciples of Jesus Christ. The Christian attitude requires us to support refugees. And it is very puzzling that we, who boast about our Christian faith, are often the least open to refugees. Finally, I quote the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, chapter 25, verse 35: 'For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a passer-by and you accepted me' (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2015, p. 17).

However, the directness of his call to respect religious values was an exception among Polish politicians who typically invoked them when referring to their personal motivations. Jan Duda, the father of the current Polish President said in an interview:

> Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, offer hospitality to travelers, dress the naked – when it comes to refugees, this is the philosophy of mercy that guides me. The parable of the Good Samaritan must be remembered. I am Catholic and profess a Christian, merciful approach. We must accept refugees (Wirtualna Polska, 2017).

He used the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37) and Judgment Day (Matthew 25: 31–46) to present his personal beliefs and his speech contradicts the views of the Law and Justice party that opposed the admission of refugees. Interestingly, Civic Platform members used Christianity to underscore the inconsistency in their opponents' actions. Marcin Święcicki, an MP representing Civic Platform asked:

> We are sitting here in this Chamber under the Cross with Jesus Christ, who was a refugee. (Applause). We heard Pope Francis' appeals to receive refugees and we have seen his actions. (…) I would like to ask why our Chamber, on the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland, distances itself from European solidarity in helping refugees (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, 2016, p. 241).

The quote demonstrates the Civic Platform politicians' practice of showing the gap between Christian values and the attitudes of right-wing politicians who successfully monopolized the Polish Catholic identity. They emphasized that neighborliness demands loving strangers without excluding anyone and criticized the current Polish discourse for contradicting the Gospel by constructing the narrative of Muslims as *jihadists*.

In Israel, the majority of policymakers were against granting asylum seekers the right of refuge. Being a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees (1951) and its Protocol (1967) was sometimes dismissed by those who proposed to remove border-crossers from national territory. However, even staunch supporters of this harsh policy typically insisted that the state acted in line with religious ethics and the moral values of Judaism. Prime Minister Netanyahu, for example, declared:

> Even when we wish to remove the foreigners from amidst us, we shall do it respectfully. We shall act in a Jewish and humane way… We shall do it in an organized manner while maintaining their dignity... I ask public figures to express themselves carefully. We shall act towards them [asylum seekers] humanely (Ynet Online, 2012a).

Unlike Poland, where public discourse centered on whether or not to admit asylum seekers, in Israel the situation was significantly different. The public debate ensued after many Sudanese and Eritreans had crossed the then unfenced border with Egypt and were already in the country. Given the human rights violations in their countries of origin, Israel chose not to deport them. Thus, the discourse focused primarily on how to treat

them during their [temporary] stay in the country. In this context, and despite their more conservative and often religious background, centrist and right-leaning politicians refrained from a direct use of the neighborliness narrative. One exception followed a violent demonstration in Tel Aviv where African migrants met with physical attacks and racist slurs. Over the next few days, various hard-liners strongly condemned the perpetrators, invoking both Jewish history and religious values in their speeches. Amnon Cohen of the Ultra-Orthodox Shas Party, which is known for it ethnocentric and anti-immigration stance, noted: "We are a people who went through difficult history, and so we mustn't do disgraceful things." Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid party similarly argued against anti-immigrant behavior.

> When I see a *pogrom* in Israel, led by inciting politicians, I wonder where these people get the *Chutzpa* to call themselves Jewish. [They] do not understand what Jewish morality is, what the collective memory of Jews is, or what is the meaning of Jewish existence (Somalfvi, 2012).

Perhaps most vocal was Shlomo Mula of the centrist Kadima Party. An Ethiopian Jew, he was angered by the racially motivated attacks, in which some Israeli citizens of Ethiopian descent, mistaken as asylum seekers, was confronted by the mob. He argued passionately:

> We were slaves in Egypt. We cannot behave this way to these people [asylum seekers]… I'd suggest we conduct public discussion with responsibility, professionalism, without harsh words. We ought to look at a person as a human being, not as a deportable person we can hurt and get rid of (Knesset Committee of the Interior, 2012, p. 16).

Not suprisingly, politicians from more liberal parties drew more heavily on the religious commandment of neighborliness in their attempts to convince the public (and the government) to treat asylum seekers justly. During the early 2010s, when the number of border-crossers—as well as anti-immigrant sentiments—reached new heights, progressive politicians noted the importance of adhering to color-blind compassion and empathy. Ironically, most of these politicians were famous for being avid secularists and strong opponents of Israel's lack of separation of state and religion. Still, in the face of rising anti-immigrant sentiments, these otherwise progressive secularists frequently referred to the said principle. Thus,

Member of Knesset Ilan Gilon, of the secular left-leaning Meretz party, was outraged by local rabbis who called on Israelis to refrain from renting apartments to asylum seekers in South Tel Aviv. Reminding them "of the biblical commandment *Thou shalt love thy stranger*," he said:

> Once again we are witnessing a racial incitement by Rabbis. The very same rabbis, who are supposed to preach the love of [all] men and the love of [the people of] Israel, incite and increase the flames in Israeli society (Goren & Ben Yosef, 2010).

Other members of the center-left opposition similarly mobilized religious principles and victimization narratives, pleading with Benjamin Netanyahu's right-leaning coalition to establish a more humane migration policy. The Holocaust, the most traumatic experience in Jewish history, was occasionally mentioned by politicians who sought to counterbalance the dominant xenophobic public discourse. Member of Knesset Dov Hanin was one of the most vocal critics of the government's anti-immigrant policy. A long-time member of the Communist, Arab–Jewish party Hadash (Democratic Front for Equality), he often used a combination of Jewish ethics and history in his pro-hospitality parliamentary speeches:

> As a state that was founded by refugees and for refugees, we are committed to a humane, Jewish, and moral approach towards refugees just like we expected [other countries] to treat Jewish refugees when they fled for their lives (Knesset Committee on the Problem of Foreign Workers, 2010, p. 29).

Years later, as he protested the government's decision to deport asylum seekers to a "safe" third country, he asked Knesset members passionately:

> Are you familiar with the data that the third country which Israel pays [in order to accept asylum seekers] later deports the very same asylum seekers to other countries? Do you remember… that Jacob, our father, was too an infiltrator in Egypt because of the famine in the Land of Caanan? Do you remember… the commandement thou shalt love the stranger who is in your gates, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt? (Knesset Proceedings, 2018, p. 3).

These quotes suggest that the biblical commandment of *love thy neighbor* was used in a rather flexible manner by Israeli politicians. Centrist and right-leaning politicians, some of whom are religious Jews, mentioned it in their public speeches. However, in many cases these references were no more than lip service, as the very same politicians unequivocally supported harsh policy measures, including refoulment and deportations. Ironically, it was typically left-leaning politicians, known for their secular sentiments, who frequently mobilized the commandment in order to convince conservative constituencies of the need to craft a humane policy—in line with biblical teachings.

Ordro Caritatis or Aniyey Ircha Kodmim: Religious Ethics and Anti-Asylum Policy

Both in Poland and Israel, there were also politicians who wished to remain righteous in the eyes of their electorate but avoid opening their country to strangers. They found a way to maintain these opposite positions by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving poor. Justifying the limits of help is well-researched (Applebaum, 2001; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Sales, 2002). However, our analysis focuses on the use of religion by politicians rather than the qualities of refugees. In Judaism, this approach is represented by the idea that "poor people of your city come first." The concept of an all-embracing love of neighbors is limited by prioritizing the more deserving, namely the weakest individuals among those closest—both ethnically and geographically—to ourselves. In the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas called it *ordo caritatis* (Order of Charity). He attempted to prioritize love and responsibility toward different entities: God, thy neighbor, the body, parents, children, relatives, and strangers (Bartoszek, 2017).

Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice party, introduced the concept of *ordo caritatis* in the Polish Parliament to denigrate the loved one's neighbor principle and limit the Polish state's obligation toward "Others":

> (…) the implementation of this principle would lead to the collapse of our civilization (…) we must look for another principle, a principle that moderates this radicalism. Well, such a principle exists, that is, *ordo caritatis*, the order of mercy, the order of love. Under this principle, first there are close

> relatives, family, then the nation, and then others (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2015, p. 14).

The Deputy Leader of the Law and Justice party, Antoni Macierewicz, argued:

> I have the duty to help my own nation first, because this nation elected me and I have to take care of its interests. I cannot reject its needs to act on behalf of other nations and other people (Radio Maryja, 2015).

Both leaders stressed that the assistance Poland could offer to asylum seekers must be commensurate with the country's limited resources and proportionate to Poland's share in the EU's GDP (Kaczyński's speech at Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2015, p. 14). Financial assistance, they claimed, should be provided in refugee camps or in countries of origin to prevent refugees from entering the Polish territory:

> So let's help refugees, let's help immigrants (…) by sharing the burden with other EU countries according to our financial abilities. Our contribution should support refugee camps or be invested in the refugees' countries of origin, so that they do not have to flee from there (Macierewicz at Radio Maryja, 2015).

The *ordo caritatis* concept was used by key Law and Justice politicians, but it did not become part of Polish politicians' vocabulary. Most public figures invoked ethno-religious similarity as a criterion to select those asylum seekers needing assistance. The President, Andrzej Duda, said that he would like to bring to Poland Christians from Syria because they are "culturally close to us and we should be concerned about the fate of Christians around the world" (Gąsior, 2015).

The Polish populist politicians found the principle of "love thy neighbor" too radical. They claimed it was impossible to help everyone and argued that Poland's economic situation justified limited assistance. They also claimed that admitting refugees (who in their narratives were equated with Muslims) would compromise national security. Muslims were presented as both a cultural and a physical threat (see Goździak & Márton, 2018).

Israeli hard-liners refrained from drawing on the neighborliness commandment for similar reasons. Instead, they deployed an alternative principle—*Aniyey Ircha Kodmim* (charity begins at home)—to appeal

to their largely conservative and religiously traditional constituency. This Talmudic value prioritizes locals over foreigners, especially during crises. While the precise definition of locals is debated, it is usually agreed that when resources are scarce, the moral duty of Jewish believers is to prioritize co-ethnics.

This principle was frequently used by politicians when articulating their position concerning the situation in the neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv. This area has been home to some of the country's most underprivileged communities and has seen Israelis and Africans struggling over the use of run-down public space and scarce resources (Cohen & Margalit, 2015). The heated political discourse that emerged oscillated between those who demanded that Africans be deported from the country or transferred (in)voluntarily to other locations and those who advocated the allocation of public resources to reinvigorate the neighborhood, thereby alleviating tense relations between rival groups.

With few exceptions, it was mostly politicians from right-of-center parties who drew explicitly on the *Aniyey Ircha Kodmim* principle. For example, Knesset Member Miri Regev of Prime Minister Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, was a vocal advocate of the removal of migrants. She often used biblical sayings as a way to stimulate her constituency, many of whom hail from traditional backgrounds:

> You have to understand that the lives of [Jewish] residents here [in South Tel Aviv] have become unbearable, Jews and Israelis are afraid of living in their own country... [So] I suggest [that] everybody start worrying about residents of their country, because the poor people of your city come first (Ynet, 2012b).

These sentiments were echoed by local politicians as well, especially those representing jurisdictions directly affected by immigration. Shlomo Maslawi, a member of the Tel Aviv City Council and resident of the HaTikva neighborhood in South Tel Aviv was a major, municipal-level advocate of asylum seekers removal. Appearing before the Council, he proclaimed "the welfare of refugees is important to me, but the poor people of your city come first. The situation here is unbearable" (Ben Yosef, 2010).

In order to depict the situation in Israel as a zero-sum game between old-timers and newcomers, and advocate for restrictionist policies, more progressive statesmen have used religious ethics as a means to call for

a more balanced policy. Chairman of the Knesset, Reuven Rivlin of the Likud party, acknowledged the need to treat asylum seekers fairly. He noted that the economic motivation of some migrants does not preclude Israel's obligation to verify whether they are entitled to asylum. Simultaneously, he argued that the state is first and foremost responsible for its own citizens:

> The fact that [asylum seekers], when asked, said they came here to work does not mean that they were not persecuted in their countries and that we shouldn't verify their status as refugees…still, it is clear to all of us that 'the poor people of your city come first,' and that it is impossible that the treatment of these asylum seekers should come at the expense of the Israeli population (Knesset News, 2012).

Knesset Member Dov Hanin also called for taking the needs of both sides into account when formulating asylum policies. While sympathetic to "the real distress" that exists in neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv, he argued that asylum seekers are suffering from it just as much as Israeli residents. He therefore argued that deportation is not the solution. Rather, he claimed:

> There has to be a comprehensive policy, which could begin with the question of border [enforcement], but has to also deal with the question of what happens to [asylum seekers] who are already here. [The policy] has to treat everyone in accordance with international law as well as Jewish ethics and clear logic, which tells us that we don't want to exacerbate the problem (Knesset Committee on the Problem of Foreign Workers, 2010, p. 31).

Unlike neighborliness, the biblical commandment to give priority to the needy in one's own community was used primarily by hard-line politicians. Using a rights-based discourse, it was applied as a means to push for a strict anti-asylum, pro-deportation agenda. However, in some cases, right-leaning politicians were willing to consider a selective, needs-based asylum policy. Not surprisingly, more progressive politicians strongly opposed the notion, calling instead for a more balanced and care-oriented approach.

Conclusions

The chapter explored how religious ethics is employed in public debates about forced migration. Using the cases of Poland and Israel, we showed the dualistic use of religious ethics. The public debates in both countries were surprisingly similar and in both cases religious ethical principles were used to argue both for *and* against the admission of refugees.

The two main principles were "love of one's neighbor" and "ordo caritatis" (Christianity) or "the poor people of your city come first" (Judaism). Whereas the former denotes an idealistic vision of the universal right to hospitality, the latter advocates the prioritization of those closest—and most similar—both geographically and culturally. These diametrically opposing principles featured prominently in the public debates about asylum policies in Poland and in Israel, illustrating the malleable nature of religious ethics. Religious teachings, we submit, are not simply a geo-historically fixed, objective set of parables, but politically motivated social constructs that change across time and space, often in accordance with the changing interests of those expressing them publicly.

Despite these similarities, there were also differences in how the debates unfolded in both countries. In Poland, the debate pivoted on whether or not to admit refugees, whereas in Israel, it centered on the appropriate policy toward asylum seekers already in the country. Consequently, Polish politicians focused on the "love of thy neighbor" principle, with liberals advocating hospitality toward refugees, and hard-liners rejecting refugees. The latter, describing refugees as physical and cultural threats, were hard-pressed to legitimize their choice by employing an alternative religious principle, namely *ordo caritatis*. This allowed them to maintain a dignified position vis-à-vis the Polish electorate, many of whom are devoted Catholics subscribing to the notion of in-group prioritization. Additionally, references to poor economic standing in comparison with other EU members were used to absolve the country from its obligation to provide assistance to asylum seekers.

In Israel, on the other hand, liberal politicians employed "love the foreigner" as a means to push for fair(er) and more just asylum policies. However, they seldom managed to convince the Israeli public, many of whom objected to the asylum system altogether. Hard-liners, who were in favor of a restrictionist asylum policy (e.g., forced removal), employed a Talmudic principle that is the binary opposition of "love the foreigner." Their plea to repatriate migrants, by force if needed, was legitimized by

resorting to the Hebrew version of the well-known "charity begins at home" principle. At times of crisis, so the argument went, it is incumbent to prioritize the needy among the in-group.

The nexus between migration and religion remains a hotly debated topic in both countries at the present time. At the time of writing, investigators of the Israeli Immigration and Population Authority raised "serious doubts" concerning the Jewish roots of some 60 Ethiopian citizens who immigrated to Israel in recent years. Meanwhile, another migration panic is looming in Poland as the country faces a cross-border mobility through its eastern border with Belarus (Grupa Granica, 2021); with migrants/refugees hailing from Muslim-majority countries, like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the Polish state is once again determined to block their entry into the country, quoting irreconcilable cultural (read religious) differences vis-à-vis the local population. Future research ought to explore these religious narratives to better understand how they are (ab)used in crafting national asylum policies.

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PART II

Lived Experiences of Religion: Belonging and Identity

CHAPTER 4

Time and Topos in Migratory Trajectories: Mapping Memory and Lived Experiences of Religion Among Syrian Refugees in Norway

Ingrid Løland

Introduction

Following a decade of bloodshed and armed conflict, an unprecedented number of Syrians have sought refuge in various parts of the world. As of 2022, 34,440 immigrants from Syria were registered in Norway, constituting the seventh-largest immigrant group in the country (Statistics Norway, 2022). In this article, I present research on the nexus of religion and forced migration among a small proportion of Syrian refugees residing in Norway.

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There is limited research on the complex role that religion, identity, and belonging play in shaping Syrians' migratory patterns and experiences. Two national studies addressing mental health and the impact of ethno-religious identities among Syrian refugees in Norway are worth mentioning (Fjeld-Solberg et al., 2020; Plesner, 2020). However, the academic literature is lacking studies on the ways that lived experiences of religion inform both real and imaginary forms of temporal and spatial displacement contexts. In an attempt to more adequately capture the multidimensional and (dis)empowering aspects of religion in Syrians' migratory experiences, my research applies a dynamic trajectory lens, in which the parameters of time and space are experientially and existentially acknowledged. This perspective shows how migration trajectories span pre-migratory life, revolution, war, flight, and exile in multiple and overlapping ways. Furthermore, I explore migration trajectories as a mirror of hybrid memory practices through which the symbolic language of metaphors is narratively conveyed. By focusing on spatiotemporal metaphors of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia, I thus attempt to map the storied landscape of Syrian refugee trajectories: an ambiguous realm in which religion, identity, and belonging fluctuate between retrospective and future-oriented processes.

Research Background and Methodology

The findings presented in this chapter draw on my doctoral dissertation, *Narrative Battles and Bridges: Religion, Identity and Conflict in Syrian Refugee Trajectories* (Løland, 2021a), and ongoing research among a selected sample of Syrian refugees residing in Norway. This research has been carried out at the nexus of religion and migration in Syrian displacement, exploring how refugees encounter, memorize, narrate, and discursively negotiate experiences of conflict, religion, and identity processes. Building on previous publications (Løland, 2019a, 2019b, 2021b) as well as unpublished findings, I focus on the parameters of time and space to adequately capture the complex realities of religion and migration in the experiences of Syrian refugees.

In my research design, I respond to a call made by various scholars to bring temporal and spatial contexts back into migration research (Crawley & Jones, 2020; Dahinden, 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Hardwick, 2014; Knott & Vasquez, 2014). The existing literature has continued to "weakly theorize space–time relationships and the impacts

of space, place, and time on migrants" (Hardwick, 2014, p. 209). Since the lived, spatial, and temporal dimensions of refugees' lives are often conspicuously missing from academic research, I apply a dynamic methodology and theoretical framework to broaden our conceptual and empirical understanding of religious entanglements in forced migration. I adopt a bottom-up view that reflects the lived complexities and challenges of a heterogeneous Syrian refugee population. The research participants of this longitudinal study thus mirror the highly diverse Syrian ethno-religious mosaic, involving Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Arab Alawites, Orthodox Christians, as well as secular or non-religious voices. So far, 30 Syrians—17 women and 13 men—with different geographical, educational, and cultural origins have been recruited and purposefully sampled from various locations in Norway. Through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and informal conversations, they have shared stories mapping their previous and ongoing migration trajectories. All were informed of and consented to the research project's ethical standards, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.[1] Although the number of interlocutors is a small proportion of a growing Syrian diaspora—currently amounting to over six million people worldwide—the participants have helped to bring forth a polyvocal approach with a narrative inquiry. Polyvocality ensures the incorporation of many voices to endorse diverse listening and present multiple points of view. Narrative inquiry is a way of grasping an *emic* (insider's) perspective and understanding of the meanings that people ascribe to life as lived. A narrative lens serves as a particularly useful tool to contest generalizations, as it endeavors to encapsulate the complexity and diversity of human experiences (Bamberg, 2016; Brannen, 2013; Eastmond, 2007, 2016; Jackson, 2013; Sigona, 2014).

Adopting a bottom-up perspective to interpret the experiential realm of Syrian refugees is especially relevant since multiple voices show different ways in which the Syrian civil war and displacement crisis have affected individuals and collectivities alike. Indeed, by adding a sociocultural framework to these polyvocal and narrative inquiries, I acknowledge the close link between the subjective and the social in Syrian refugee trajectories. When studying refugees' lived experiences, subjectivities, identities, meanings, interpretations, and discourses, a larger historical, cultural, and political canvas is needed to gain a deeper understanding of spatiotemporal contexts. Stephen Castles (2012, p. 8), for example, points out that "micro-level studies of specific migratory experiences … should always

be embedded in an understanding of the macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility in a specific historical situation." Given Syria's recent history of war, violence, and forced displacement, Syrians' stories necessarily feed into an intricate web of narrative battles and bridges, where identity politics and religion are entangled in ways that are both contested and shared. Therefore, a sociocultural narrative approach can function as a helpful vantage point to capture broader discursive patterns concerning people's senses of identity, sameness, and otherness.

Entanglements of Religion in Conflict-Induced Displacement

In relation to migration debates, I contend that conflict-induced displacement represents a distinct category within the broader phenomenon of migration (Goździak & Shandy, 2002; Mahmud, 2021). When studying people who flee due to armed conflict, civil war, and violent uprooting, I have stressed the need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how religion intersects with such processes. This implies that religion and religious identification processes ought to be studied within a conceptual framework more sensitively tuned toward the *coerced* nature of ruptured life courses. A dynamic spectrum of push and pull factors affects the migration of Syrians, highlighting the fact that "degrees of volition and constraints are constantly at play" (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018, p. 11). Thus, I argue for a holistic view of migration that goes beyond displacement determining circumstances. Forced migration entails multilayered journeys, within which different temporalities and spatialities are constantly at play. A departure from a narrow gaze on migration as a linear movement from A to B calls for the inclusion of shifting trajectories that simultaneously display both backward- and forward-oriented processes (Pine, 2014).

Deciphering the entanglements of religion in these trajectories reveals highly mixed and disputed research findings. I have discerned that what we deem as an assemblage of "religious issues" are contingent upon contrasting views and shifting times and spaces. Considering that Syrians display both controversial ideas about religion and varying degrees of affiliation to particular ethno-religious identities, it is pertinent to avoid over-essentializing the role of religion for all Syrians and at all times (Beaman et al., 2017). Rabo highlights that religion, although important, is not an "all-compassing aspect of a person's social being."

> Class background, region or place of origin, profession, clan or kin group, and political affiliations are equally important in how Syrians present themselves and in how they classify others (Rabo, 2012, p. 83).

Therefore, rather than offering a pre-defined conceptualization of religion, I have left it open to an organic interpretation as seen through the encounters, experiences, and discursive practices relayed by both the religious and secular participants of this study. "Lived religion" has proven to aptly address these discrepancies, as it concerns "ordinary people" and "everyday life" as opposed to the more institutional and doctrinal aspects of religion (Ammerman, 2016, pp. 7–9). The personalized dimension of how religion is experienced or perceived is thus of compelling value when investigating empirical variations within the stories of Syrian refugees. The field of lived religion resonates well with existential anthropology, which views the realm of experiences as a lived reality in which "human lives … unfold and are transformed in everyday situations, events, and interactions" (Jackson & Piette, 2017, p. 6).

Although I apply an everyday take on the lived dimension of religion in Syrian testimonies, I view these realities as situated in *extraordinary* settings rather than in the trajectories of day-to-day normalcy. Presenting religion-related issues against the backdrop of war, displacement, and refugeehood, my analysis points to a complex and contested landscape of religious heterogeneity in times of turmoil. Stories range from inter-religious dialogue and coexistence to inter- and intra-relational tensions, violence, and sectarianism. Respondents' testimonies such as "we were just like one family before the war" (Løland, 2019a, p. 750), "we were all divided," and "sectarianism is in the blood of Syria" (Løland, 2019b, pp. 9, 16) serve as but a few examples of such discrepancies. The pool of collected stories as a whole, however, simultaneously conveys religion as a profound meaning-making framework and a source of resilience and existential hope, as well as a component of intergroup conflict, civil war, and forced displacement. Therefore, when probed against the plurality of voices and experiences of Syrian refugees, these (dis)empowering, ambiguous, and controversial aspects of religion need to be included to gain analytical depth and understanding.

Time and Topos: Mapping Migratory Paths and Horizons

The trajectory approach I apply in my research shows how key experiences in individual Syrian life stories are always temporally and spatially situated, embedded in both real and imaginary worlds. In my research, I view migratory trajectories not merely as physical and linear movements, but also as overlapping social, existential, and symbolic forms of mobility. Furthermore, my findings suggest that trajectories can best be accessed through a narrative lens in which memory and metaphors play a vital role. Borrowing Koselleck's terminology (2004, p. 261), we see how multifarious memory practices among Syrian refugees address "spaces of experiences" that in turn generate various "horizons of expectations." When mapping the paths and horizons in Syrian refugee narratives, storytelling may be likened to a "path of memories" (Assmann & Conrad, 2010, p. 6) and religion to "a chain of memory" (Hervieu-Léger, 2000) that links vital aspects of past, present, and future. Given that both memories and narratives are creative (re)constructions, rendering any interpretation partial and selective (Eastmond, 2007), it is vital to approach storytelling as a mirror image of a plurality of meaning-making and discursive practices (Bamberg, 2016). Rather than resorting to viewing narratives solely as following the classical structure of a beginning, middle, and end, storytelling must be understood as a reflection of the often messy and contested dimensions of lived realities. For example, it is imperative to regard the unstructured elements of ruptured life courses as part and parcel of refugee stories. Indeed, as Frank (2010) argues in research on narratology and illness, we must acknowledge the narrative disorder and the indefinite nature of stories. Instead, we can see any story as "a portal" into other stories, resonating "multiple truths that have respective claims to expression" (Frank, 2010, p. 37). This interpretative openness is compelling when investigating how narrative battles and bridges reflect shared and disputed encounters and memories of the Syrian war and displacement crisis.

Addressing paths and horizons as shifting spaces and temporalities in conflict-induced displacement alludes to a dynamic understanding of the terms "roots" and "routes" introduced by Clifford (1997). Migrants' roots play a vital role in distinguishing who they are, both individually and collectively. The term thus speaks to ethnic, religious, and cultured identities, bound in place, socialized through time, and contextualized in

historical and political circumstances. While roots refer to the ideals of the past—to dwelling, belonging, and attachment to place—they are also linked to the present by forming the basis for negotiating new experiences and navigating alien terrains. Conversely, routes speak to the multiple and multidirectional ways in which migrants cross, travel, and sojourn in processes of displacement. This may entail physical mobility as much as psycho-social strategies and existential maneuvering along the "broken journeys" into refugeehood (Jackson, 2013). Rather than viewing these terms as dichotomous, I emphasize their interdependence. Both roots and routes therefore engulf human experiences, enabling memory practices to constantly cross the spatial boundaries of "here and there" as well as the temporalities of "then and now."

In relation to narrative memory, I argue for an imaginative capacity and attentive listening when representing contested and contesting refugee stories. Stressing the importance of polyvocal testimonies, it has been vital to conduct an open-ended conversation with the empirical findings, to acknowledge the disputed, manipulated, buried, or silenced aspects of memories. My research shows that what is accounted for "front-stage" and what is hidden "back-stage" (Goffman, 1971) in Syrians' discourse on religion and identity is often tied to cultural taboos and political constraints. While these restrictions are lingering in exile, many Syrians try to break free and (re)articulate their identities in new ways. Given this situation, I propose a dynamic perspective on Syrian refugees' memory practices. They may be viewed as a human "struggle" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 259) to cross boundaries, overcome past traumas, and combat various religious and sociopolitical infringements. Simultaneously, they may be important devices to re-orient and explain how people change when faced with disrupted life courses. Also, as testified to in some of my interlocutors' stories, going down memory lane may not be a desirable path for all; the pain of remembering can be replaced by forgetting as a strategy for restoring order out of chaos.

Having delineated the research background and its methodology, as well as my understanding of what underpins narrative memory when exploring religion in the spatiotemporal realm of conflict-induced displacement, I will now share some of my findings. The findings address moments of time that are linked to various topoi (themes) conveyed by my interlocutors. In order to contextualize the empirical material, I have employed the three metaphors of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia as categorical frames enveloping the storied landscape of migratory

experiences. Metaphors are not merely figurative speech acts without deeper significance, but a form of conceptual discourse that invokes multiple perspectives and narrative standpoints. As such, metaphors may be described as representational and overlapping frames within which the entanglements of religion and identity discourses dynamically fluctuate.

Utopia: Negotiating Past and Future Forms of Coexistence

Metaphors of paradise and a longing for paradise lost appeared in many refugees' narratives regarding pre-war Syria. It was surprising that the harsh political climate invoked such paradisical references. However, many interlocutors used such metaphors. The metaphors held varied connotations for different participants and I deemed them worthy of further scrutiny. Narratives describing interreligious tolerance, intercultural togetherness, and peaceful coexistence were woven into the identity fabric of most Syrians. Some referred to the long, multicultural history of Syria as a uniting legacy that transcended other ethno-religious identity markers. Others described the personal friendships or the brotherly relationships that existed in cosmopolitan and multi-religious neighborhoods. One Christian respondent reminisced that, before the war, Christians and Muslims were "celebrating everything together, sharing life, supporting each other. … It was a nice and peaceful life" (Løland, 2019b, p. 16). The women participating in focus group discussions on religious identities and differing faiths corroborated this recollection. They agreed that co-workers, students, neighbors, and friends were first and foremost regarded as fellow citizens and not as intrinsically different based on ethnic, religious, or tribal affiliations. Thus, part of the findings showed that the salience of religion and religious identities appeared to be either less visible or positively fused into nostalgic accounts of a peaceful, prosperous, and religiously diverse past.

Through a theoretical lens of memory, nostalgia, and metaphors, it was possible to analyze these results within the spatiotemporal unit of utopia (Løland, 2019a). According to Ricoeur (1976), longing for and belonging to a place and time in which feelings of paradise are evoked are not merely ideas projected onto the future time, but they also embody powerful symbolic representations of the past. Participants expressed mixed feelings of pride and pain when talking about their peaceful and convivial interreligious relationships. These feelings were contrasted with

the destructive social divisions caused by war and displacement. The utopian imagery explained how, when something meaningful has been lost, nostalgia pushes forth a longing for a golden past and helps establish a sense of continuity in situations of total discontinuity (Synnes, 2015). However, the narratives of pre-war Syria were divided and not unequivocally positive regarding a paradise lost. While some stories indicated interreligious tensions lurking beneath the surface of harmonious coexistence, others recounted a fear of or compliance with the political realities on the ground. These disparate findings prompted me to probe memory practices against the ethno-religious identity politics of modern-day Syria and to interpret their negative and fear-inducing side effects for Syrian society. Thus, in order to locate the "snake" embedded within the tales of paradise, it was necessary to understand how the oppressive mechanisms of the long-asserted Assad regime had deprived the Syrian people of healthy discussions about political and religious differences.

Analyzing the utopian metaphor, I needed to scrutinize discursive expressions against the discrepancies of past tensions, whether they were perceived to be political, religious, or regarding human relations. If we define utopia as "a desire for a better life" (Levitas, 2011, p. 191), the empirical data show that imagery of such a life is drawn from both past and future aspirations. These divergences were most explicitly articulated when moving from pre-war accounts to stories describing the historical turning point that occurred in Syria in 2011. Here, the counter-narratives to the tales of an idealized past gained relevance in relation to the Arab Spring and the awakening Syrian revolution. For those who actively took part in the uprising, talk of the good old days could be perceived as both an ignorant and deceitful sort of nostalgia. For some, it obliterated the very reasons behind the fundamental calls for change, freedom, and democracy demanded by the Syrian revolution. Portraying a glorified and flawless version of Syria's past was seen to undermine the *raison d'être* upon which the revolutionary ideals were laid. It could also support the regime's master narrative of being the sole provider of security, peace, and prosperity. Thus, many of my interlocutors placed the notion of a utopia at the moment when the revolution started. They perceived it as the beginning of a brand-new era, in which a "tsunami of hope" would usher in a chance to "breathe freedom" and be "born again" (Løland, 2019b). Different understandings of paradise thus entered the scene, as exemplified by the many slogans and revolutionary songs celebrating radical changes and exalting a new Syria in otherworldly terms. For many, the

dream of a democratic Syria envisioned a new form of living together in which secular and ethno-religious identities were neither silenced nor subdued, but rather incorporated into an equally shared space of justice for all citizens. For some of the Sunni Muslim respondents, the revolution was an opportunity to demand justice for their long-held underprivileged status as well as a way to re-appropriate their religious identity with renewed fervor.

While the revolution may be seen as a space in which people could actively articulate changes and aspirations, in relation to religion and identity discourses, for instance, my findings show that it was a deeply contested space from the very beginning. Voiced most strongly by some Christian respondents, the uprising was perceived as threatening and destabilizing, inaugurating feelings of repulsion and fear rather than hope and freedom. As such, their stories aligned more with the regime's master narrative, in which demonstrators were characterized as terrorists and sectarian fanatics as well as foreign conspirators, intent on destroying the multi-religious Syria. At the same time, some people with minority status also sympathized with the regime critics but felt either threatened or alienated when the revolution turned increasingly violent and sectarian. As the dreams of the revolution failed to materialize and the country plunged into civil war, it left behind another "lost space." Some respondents saw it as an existential task to refill that space in exile, expressing a utopian yearning to keep the spark of the revolutionary narrative alive. Others expressed a sense of defeat or hopelessness in the face of the dystopic nightmare that was to befall all Syrian citizens in the aftermath of the revolution. Therefore, I turned my attention to the heteroglossia of grassroots experiences regarding intercultural relations and religious coexistence, claiming "history from below" (Burke, 2019) as an important lens through which ordinary people negotiate historically significant turning points from very different perspectives.

Dystopia: Negotiating War, Violence, and Religious Identity Othering

Analyzing war and displacement stories, I noticed that refugee stories are evocative of different aspects of dystopian experiences. Certainly, the everyday violence, with its sounds of bombs, shootings, and artillery, was enough to cause shock and disbelief among all the participants. Many of the respondents said that these dramatic and changing realities were

hard to fathom, let alone accept as a new kind of normalcy when life as they knew it had been turned upside down. One respondent described the war as "an eternal hell" where suffering and horror reigned. Another described it as "an unimaginable tragedy," the scale of which would leave anyone "paralyzed" (Løland, 2019b, p. 17). Engulfed in these experiences of death and disaster, stories revealed that an existential kind of insecurity penetrated the social fabric of intercultural and interreligious relations in Syria. A kind of fragmentation emerged along ethno-religious lines. It became visible in people's work life, in public discourse, on the streets, and in conversations among friends and family members. One respondent described these divisive transformations as a toxic atmosphere that was gradually "infesting all Syrians from inside" (Løland, 2019b).

An analysis of these changes within the framework of sectarianism showed that both secular and religious participants of different ethno-religious backgrounds were exposed to mistrust, alienation, and social degradation. These factors shaped their perception of their own identity and that of the (religious) others. Religion was appropriated as both a weapon and a shield for warring parties on the battlefield, dramatically affecting the felt reality of ordinary people. Indeed, my research into the macro-narrative landscape in Syrian war discourses showed that all parties in the conflict usurped derogatory sectarian language that exacerbated identity-othering and legitimized religion-related violence. As testified by many research participants, being caught between opposing factions and conspiracies pushed forward coerced forms of allegiances or situations in which balancing religious identities became a matter of life and death. One respondent provided a vivid example when his Sunni Muslim identity was questioned and severely threatened by both the regime forces and Islamist opposition fighters. Another respondent said, "I feared them all" when describing his multiple displacements within Syria as a perilous series of maneuvers between areas where the regime, ISIL, and other opposition groups were fighting for control (Løland, 2021b, para. 52). Although some participants took a meta-perspective and viewed the war as "wrapped under a religious cover" (Ibid., para. 40), cynically used by parties to disguise other power-related agendas, there could be no denying that the disempowering vicissitudes of religious identity politics were present in the collected stories. The various voices among Christian minority groups and Muslim majority

and minority groups reflected processes of sectarianization in which fear-inducing war experiences reinforced in-group solidarity and exclusionary identity discourses.

Rather than viewing identity contestations as manifestations of an ancient hatred, I argue for taking a narrative identity approach in order to understand how contexts, experiences, and encounters shaped identity dynamics at micro and macro levels of society. This approach provides insights into the historical and political climates impacting storytellers' lives. Discussing political narratives anthropologically always involves "an examination of the relationship between the stories of individuals and the stories of the communities in which they live" (Andrews, 2014, p. 355). My findings heed the call for considering historical memory discrepancies more ardently when discussing the religious and political roots of the Syrian conflict (Balanche, 2018; Lefèvre, 2013; Pearlman, 2016). One major finding, which I have called "the haunting of Hama" (Løland, 2019b), indicates that Syrians' memory practices invoke events from the past and re-inscribe them into the present. It refers to the domestic conflict between the ruling Ba'ath regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, which culminated in the 1982 Hama massacre. Shadows of this incident, and the processes that led up to it, resurfaced in most of my participants' stories, appearing to collectively affect entire generations across ethno-religious divides. However, the research shows that Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Alawites had deeply contested reasons for reinterpreting these events into the current conflict. When viewed as long-buried narratives of fear, it was possible to discern how memory imprints had created narratives of victimization, which gained renewed currency when the Syrian revolution and civil war broke out. For some of the Christians and Alawites, the haunting of Hama evoked fear of minority marginalization and religious persecution at the hands of Islamist extremists. For some of the Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, it replicated a sense of being under perpetual surveillance by the regime and of being targeted as prime adversaries based on their (perceived) religious identity affiliations. Therefore, we may see that some of these respective narratives of victimization could be well-founded from a particular group's perspective, while simultaneously reproducing latent tensions from the past that stimulated sectarian stereotyping of the religious Other.

The image of dystopia serves to describe these spaces of experience that engulfed the time of war and conflictual relations, directly impacting people's decisions to flee, either internally in Syria or across international

borders. One respondent recounted: "It was fear on all the roads leading out of Syria" (Løland, 2021b, para. 52). My research shows that fear—in all its modalities (e.g., Pearlman, 2016)—served as a complex backdrop to the narratives of refugeehood. Both identity battles of the past and the war's scenes of havoc and horror were ingrained within these omnipresent realities of fear. In order to understand the existentially overwhelming circumstances in which violence, insecurity, and upheaval resulted in one of the largest displacement crisis in modern history, I needed to utilize vocabulary that could articulate modalities of chaos and fear more perceptively. Drawing on existential anthropology (Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Piette, 2017), I was able to discern how religion and identity ambiguously played into the arbitrary "turning points and catastrophes" of my respondents' lives (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 169). As such, the research has provided a hitherto overlooked dimension on the (dis)empowering aspects of religion in the Syrian refugee crisis, pointing to a heterotopic landscape of in-betweens when studying religion in liminal experiences of displacement.

Heterotopia: Negotiating Religion Through the In-Betweens of Displacement and Exile

Heterotopia is a term I have borrowed from Foucault (1986) to discuss the ambiguous realm of liminality in Syrians' stories of displacement and refugeehood. It describes all the trajectories I have investigated in my research. As a metaphor for the in-betweens of memories, encounters, and negotiating practices, it envelops the physical, emotional, and psychological experiences pertinent to an overall and dynamic understanding of religion and forced migration. However, when investigating the phase of flight and emigration (Løland, 2021b), I used it as a metaphorical prism for understanding the existential dimensions of Syrian displacement trajectories. The migratory journeys recounted by my interlocutors were reflective of new and different kinds of dystopia, in which the precariousness of life engulfed the trials of crossing land and sea in search of a safe haven. Although removed from actual scenes of war, the participants shared memories of new, fear-inducing sensations that simultaneously reflected profound transformations, choices, and redirections. As floating pieces of places (Foucault, 1986), their journeys represented multiple heterotopias, in which the perceived dichotomies between vulnerability and agency required further scrutiny. By critically examining religion and

identity re/deconstructions in these stories, I was able to identify some of the different and contradicting ways in which religion intersects with forced migration.

The results showed that for many, migration could be a "theologizing experience" (Smith, 1978, as cited in Frederiks, 2016, p. 186), in which religious faith and fellowship provided resilience, hope, and identity reaffirmation. For some, religion articulated a divine framing of experiences oscillating between life and death, thus helping to vocalize a powerful "semantic of survival" (Perl, 2019, p. 19). Religion also provided a sense of a secure place in the god-forsaken non-spaces of displacement. Whether in the desert, at sea, or along border crossings, the precarity of certain places was alleviated through religious companionship, in which prayers, rituals, and togetherness provided a sense of "*communitas*" (Turner, 1995) and structure in an otherwise drifting and unstructured existence. This resonates with spatial studies that view religion as an inherently social phenomenon, existing and expressing itself in and through space (Knott, 2005). It also echoes studies that see religion functioning as an appropriate medium that speaks to the transitional and liminal stages of migration (Hagan & Straut-Eppsteiner, 2012; Levitt, 2007). However, some of the collected stories contradicted religion's role in providing meaning and comfort during displacement. Instead, the social alienation experienced during the Syrian war, for some, reinforced feelings of animosity and estrangement. As one respondent recounted, "Syrians have a problem with each other"; in her mind, displacement only served to intensify separation and fragmentation along political and ethno-religious lines (Løland, 2021b, para. 86). Such discrepancies in the stories called for transcending presupposed assumptions about religion and acknowledging the complex multi-vocalities that are inherent in diverse experiences.

For those who escaped Syria, the utopian impulse (Levitas, 2011) to envision a better way of life was no longer tied to their home country, but to an undefined space of refuge elsewhere. In the words of one respondent, there was "an urge to get out of fear and the need to get to safety" (Løland, 2021b, para. 52). At the point of being dislocated from Syria, respondents were painfully aware of the impossibility of return, thus pushing their quest for safety and survival in different directions. To paraphrase Bauman (2003), it may be inferred that the very topos in their utopian yearning had ceased to exist, as the Syria they once knew was left

in ruins. Nevertheless, when many of my respondents suffered from disillusionment about the future and lacked safe reference points, thinking of Syria invigorated nostalgic memories of an idealized past. Indeed, crisis "creates a consciousness of that which has been lost" (Jackson, 2013)—even when that loss represents a space of memory that was differentiated and in flux from the beginning.

Exile: Negotiating New Spaces of Experiences and Horizons of Expectations

Locating religion in the multiple geographies and directionalities of in-between places, I have argued for reconceptualizing the complex and dynamic realities of migration journeys. Heterotopia may not then merely denote non-spaces, in which religion and identities are stuck in existential perils. They are also moving spaces where hope and new expectations are generated. Dimensions of life in exile provide new layers of understanding for these fragmented aspects of heterotopia. New forms of in-betweenness may be manifested during phases of resettlement as shadows of a painful past merge with expectations for the future. However, new experiences of marginalization, estrangement, and socioeconomic challenges can add to the strains of the present. Furthermore, the very notion of exile can be likened to an existential form of chaos in which separation from one's native country and displacement to territories of not-belonging create the void of a "discontinuous state of being" (Said, 2001, p. 177). Indeed, resettlement can establish new liminalities, as the process of displacement generates an unfinished condition of not yet belonging "here" but no longer "there." While many of the participants in this study expressed gratitude and relief at having found shelter in a peaceful country, the sense of being dislocated from Syria and not yet integrated into Norwegian society summoned new liminal feelings of being betwixt and between. My findings are to a large extent echoed in a national survey on mental health and quality of life among Syrian refugees in Norway (Fjeld-Solberg et al., 2020), in which a relatively high exposure to pre-, peri-, and post-migratory trauma and stress impacts life in exile.

In my ongoing and preliminary research on the role of religion among Syrians in exile, there also exist emerging patterns of religious and intercultural life that provide interesting polyvocal experiences. As can be expected, these patterns show significant variations among a heterogeneous Syrian refugee group. Some actively seek spiritual fellowship in the

churches and mosques in their neighborhoods, whereas others adhere to more private forms of religious practice. Some of the Muslim participants find that publicly displaying their religious affiliation can draw negative attention from the host society, including degrees of Islamophobic resentment. More conservative individuals have expressed concern for their children's future regarding protecting traditional values against secularism and sexual promiscuity. Many liberals and atheists, on the other hand, have expressed a sense of relief for living in a society in which identity labels are less associated with religious affiliation and where freedom of thought is guaranteed by the constitution. However, some also experience undue pressure from fellow Syrians to show greater compliance with moral and religious values. As one participant said, "I face a double fight here in Norway. As an Alawite, I am looked upon as a traitor to the Syrian revolution. But being an atheist is considered worse. I try to uphold a sense of dignity, but internal suspicion tears the Syrians apart." Another participant stated that it is not so much religion as politics that counts: "What matters here is whether you are pro- or anti-Assad." These statements show that both (non)religious and political affiliations are at stake when navigating intercultural relations among Syrians in exile. Therefore, my research shows that some of the same political, ethnic, and religious tensions that escalated and perpetuated the conflict back in Syria have been reproduced in the diaspora. My interlocutors are still wary of talking about sensitive issues, as religion and politics are considered particularly volatile in terms of experiences of mistrust and disunity. Some participants have indicated a fear of infiltration by agents of the regime and worry that war criminals from different sides of the conflict might be hiding in their communities. I believe that many of these interreligious and cultural tensions stem from the fact that the Syrian war is an ongoing and unresolved conflict, naturally asserting its continuous and disproportionate impact on Syrians abroad. However, these forms of fragmented negotiating practices provide only a partial picture of a growing Syrian diaspora. We need more research on the various manners in which post-migrating Syrians pave the way for future aspirations and navigate new contexts of belonging. This includes looking at transnational ties and practices, as well as to what degree the diaspora can generate safe spaces for (religious) reconciliation and coexistence.

Conclusion

In an attempt to provide a more holistic and nuanced account of migratory paths and horizons, I set out to trace lived experiences of religion in Syrian displacement trajectories. I underscored the need to look at the nexus of religion and migration as representative of dynamic processes, enveloping a range of social and existential (mis)encounters, emotions, and contradicting imaginings. By applying a spatiotemporal framework, I analyzed various phases and metaphorical categories through which real and imaginary movements of displacement can be contextualized. When approaching trajectories as a storied landscape and a discursive field, I was able to show the ways in which memories of life-rupturing events are subject to shared and contested meaning-making. Finally, by offering perspectives from below and from ordinary people whose voices are often neglected in public and academic discourse, I highlighted the need to apply a polyvocal perspective on religion when researching the multidimensional aspects of displacement in time and space.

Note

1. The Norwegian National Research Ethic Committee (https://etikkom.no/en/) has validated and approved the research project.

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CHAPTER 5

"Emerging Forms of Authority in Land Access?": The Occult and Witchcraft Among Malawian Migrants in Peri-urban Zimbabwe

Johannes Bhanye

Introduction and Background

This chapter focuses on how displaced transnational migrants establish themselves in rough peri-urban spaces in destination countries. Peri-urban refers to transitional spaces where people, resources, and goods connect and move between rural and urban areas. Roughness in this study metaphorically denotes the difficulties experienced by migrants in destination countries by virtue of their foreign descent. In this chapter, I focus on displaced Malawians in Zimbabwe's peri-urban spaces. The *transnational* quality of Malawi-to-Zimbabwe migration can be traced to the colonial period. Malawian descendants originally came to

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Zimbabwe as labor migrants during the period of colonial labor migration (*Chibaro/Mthandizi*), between the 1890s and the 1970s (Daimon, 2015). The displacement of Malawian descendants in Zimbabwe resulted from the events of the infamous Fast Tract Land Reform Program, dubbed the "Third Chimurenga," which resulted in white colonial farmers losing farms to local Zimbabweans (Moyo, 2005). Malawian descendants, who constituted the majority of the farm workers on the white colonial farms in Zimbabwe, were the most affected. Anusa Daimon (2015) affirmed that Zimbabwe's land reform program was traumatic for farm workers, specifically those of foreign ancestry, as they remained in the shadows and were largely invisible in the politics of land appropriation. Scholars such as Lloyd Sachikonye (2003) and Sam Moyo (2005) observed that prior to land reform, about 4500 white commercial farmers employed an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 farm workers, who together with their families represented about two million people, or nearly 20 percent of the country's population, of which 11 percent were of Malawian descent.

Ultimately, about 500,000 to 900,000 people were displaced and the livelihoods of approximately two million people were severely disrupted, leaving many without jobs, homes, schools, water, and clinics (Hartnack, 2017). For many Malawian descendants, the land reform destroyed the only home and source of livelihood they had ever known in Zimbabwe since the colonial era. The reform also exposed them to displacement, leaving many impoverished and marooned on farms, while others were forcibly displaced to urban areas and squatter camps such as Lydiate (the area of study) with questionable land rights. In these spaces, Malawian diaspora and their descendants have remained on the margins of the social, economic, and political affairs of Zimbabwe. They have constantly been regarded as "migrants" or "the Other," as expressed through labels such as *Vatevera njanji* (those who followed the railway line on foot), *Vabvakure* (those who came from afar), *Mabwidi* (those without rural homes), or "totem-less ones" (Daimon, 2015).

The aspect of roughness experienced by migrants at their destination has remained unexplored in African urban research, which has typically analyzed the processes and consequences of migration (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Van Hear et al., 2018). The ground-breaking work by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2005), for example, is largely preoccupied with the drivers of migration on a global scale. Similarly, the detailed studies from the Southern African Migration Project deal with

the capital flows that characterize southern African migration (Crush et al., 2015). Why scholars do not pay attention to this matter is not difficult to understand: They generally hold the destination in Africa to be non-problematic and assume that migrants need not do anything to remain therein. Unfortunately, this is an erroneous assumption because—as research is beginning to show—destinations are indeed rough and conflictual (Nyamwanza & Dzingirai, 2020). These places are so rough that migrants have to adopt innovative strategies to remain in certain areas (Bhanye & Dzingirai, 2019; Nyamwanza & Dzingirai, 2019). Migrants who fail to adjust suffer; some return home, often in shame. This element of roughness can therefore not be understated.

Regarding the strategies for surviving roughness, some scholars show that migrants can turn to political patronage to remain established in the contested peri-urban spaces (Bhanye & Dzingirai, 2020; Chirisa, 2014; Scoones, 2015). These scholars note that migrants may vote for powerful political patrons or "big men" in exchange for protection from eviction (Bhanye & Dzingirai, 2020; Muchadenyika, 2015). Other scholars highlight the use of social networks for survival, including biological and fictive kin (Berge et al., 2014; Zuka, 2019). Preliminary evidence also suggests that migrants can establish themselves through religion and the occult. The anthropologist Peter Geschiere (1997), writing about the Maka people in Cameroon, argued that contemporary religious ideas and practices are often a response to modern pressures rather than just a cultural custom. In his famous piece, *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, which detailed the symbolic lives and religious experiences of residents in Çatalhöyük, Turkey, Ian Hodder (2010) highlights the fact that spirituality and religious ritual play a strong role in the establishment of marginal populations. Studying Mozambican refugees in the Tongogara refugee camp in Zimbabwe, Ann Mabe (1994) observes that spiritual beliefs play a vital role in coping with transition and that they extend beyond the refugee camp to impact integration in the country of settlement. A study by Isabel Mukonyora (2008) shows how the Masowe Apostles constructed a theology of hope that sustained their followers in their continued migration through southern, central, and eastern Africa. A study by Jennifer Sigamoney (2018) among Somali migrants in South Africa demonstrates that religion and spirituality play a major role in supporting the resilience of Somali migrants. Thus, migration scholarship shows that religion and ritual are important aspects of the lives of transnational migrants and diaspora communities in destination countries.

Nonetheless, the aspect of religion and ritual practices facilitating access to and security over land remains poorly understood.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of religion and ritual in facilitating access to and security over land among migrants in the peri-urban areas in Zimbabwe. The understanding of *access* in this study is based on Jesse Ribot and Nancy Lee Peluso's definition (2003, p. 1) that describes it as "the ability to derive benefits from things." Access is more akin to "a bundle of powers" than to just the notion of a "bundle of rights." Security over land means the ability to retain or hold on to the land. Security over land is an important matter because the land that migrants hold in peri-urban spaces is also coveted by other parties, including the "natives," other migrants, the state, and local authorities; all have competing claims.

The chapter is divided into several sections. The first section includes an introduction and background of the study. This is followed by a methodological note presenting the ethnographic fieldwork that guided this study and a brief description of the area of study—Lydiate, Zimbabwe. An overview of the Nyau cult follows. Next, I present key findings of my study on the Nyau cult as a form of authority in access to and security over land and witchcraft as a form of authority in securing land. I conclude that peri-urban migrant squatter settlements have become dynamic spaces with novel forms of authority—the occult and witchcraft—regulating access to coveted resources such as land. The reason why displaced migrants turn to these alternative forms of authority is not because they prefer it but very often there are no formal institutions that they can use. The existing ones, including courts of law and local authorities, are often unsympathetic toward their interests.

Methodological Note

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among Malawian migrants (herein referred to as Lydiatians) who settled in Lydiate, a peri-urban squatter settlement in the town of Norton, Zimbabwe. I carried out an 18-month-long fieldwork from May 2018 to January 2019. Through what I termed "partial immersion ethnography," I was an observer of both the traditional closed squatter community of Lydiate and the greater sphere of the Lydiate area. This micro/macro focus was important because Lydiate is a diverse and fluid community and the people there do things that go beyond the community borders.

In the squatter settlement, I was a participant observer in various social spaces, including Nyau ceremonies, church gatherings, and community meetings. I also made observations while taking transect walks inside and outside of the community of Lydiate. Through these observations, I managed to capture the various operations of the Nyau cult, including initiation ceremonies, territorial marking mobility in the community, scary costumes, dances, and violent and dreadful gestures. The observations were complemented by in-depth interviews with 50 purposively selected participants both within and outside the settlement. Selected participants from the community provided insights regarding the role of the Nyau cult in land matters in Lydiate. Other study participants in the community gave insights into the use of witchcraft by fellow migrants to resolve land disputes. In-depth interviews with the caretakers and indigenous owners of farms and agro-residential plots surrounding the Lydiate community focused on the fear that Nyau cult members would appropriate some of the available lands. All the individuals I interviewed provided informed consent. Furthermore, in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, all the participants were given pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were necessary because of their unresolved citizenship status, which remains a major issue in the Lydiate community.

Lydiate: A Brief Background

Lydiate is a peri-urban squatter settlement in the town of Norton, Zimbabwe. The settlement also falls under the Zimbabwean Mashonaland West Province, in Ward 14 of the Chegutu Rural District Council. Life in the Lydiate squatter settlement is tough. Just like other squatter settlements in southern Africa, Lydiate is what Owen Nyamwanza and Vupenyu Dzingirai (2020) term a "rough neighborhood." The biggest challenge migrants face is an acute scarcity of land for settlement. The population in the squatter settlement has grown to about 1200,[1] with more than 60 percent of the migrants being between the ages of 18 and 35 (ZimStats, 2013); they now require their own individual plots of land for settlement. The squatter settlement sits on a six-hectare piece of land (L. Rafamoyo, personal communication, June 15, 2018) and the sizes of individual plots vary from one migrant to another, but are generally very small, averaging 50 m. The majority of the housing structures are temporary or semi-permanent shacks made of poles and mud, tin and zinc roofing sheets, and plastic and metal scraps. Local natives victimize

the Lydiatians. They perceive them as squatters who should be removed in order to increase the value of the recently developed agro-residential plots adjacent to the squatter settlement. These agro-residential plots owned by indigenous Zimbabweans occasionally exploit Lydiatians for labor. However, some of these properties, together with the large-scale commercial farms to the immediate west, are vacant and often attract the attention of landless migrants in the compound.

In terms of community social organization, the Lydiatians now have internal differences based on the history of the settlement. To begin with, there are *vauyi vakare*—long-term migrants—who have settled in the core of the settlement. Then there are *vauyi vazvino*—or recent migrants. These newer migrants are settled on the periphery of the settlement in areas known as *kuma nyusitendi* (new stands). Leadership in the community is articulately defined. Within the compound there are elected leaders *masabhuku* (village heads) who maintain a register (*bhuku*) of the settlement. The *masabhuku* command respect from the migrants, who regard them as instrumental in facilitating access to land. Some of the village heads are also leaders of Nyau cult ceremonies and initiations.

Lydiatians are very religious. There are various religions in the community, but the dominant ones are Christianity, Islam, and the Nyau cult. There is a mosque by the road and there are multiple churches whose shrines are scattered around and outside the compound. It is common for members to belong to multiple faiths and visitors are similarly expected to participate in different forms of worship. I was invited to attend Islamic ceremonies, but I was also expected to participate in activities organized by local Christian churches. Finally, there is the enchanting and dramatic Nyau cult, giving the settlers a voice and influencing their lives. This cult organizes dances and initiation rites for the youth. The Nyau ceremonies and dances—frequented by many—take place on weekends, usually after church services. Like all other religious leaders, the Nyau leaders are respected by the Lydiatians. They are believed to have powers to inflict harm or bring illness on those who are insubordinate and go against their decisions.

The Nyau Cult

The occult can be defined as the knowledge of the hidden that extends pure reason and the physical sciences (Geschiere, 1997). It also refers to the clandestine, hidden, or secret (Moore & Sanders, 2003). Nyau,

also known as Gule Wamkulu, is both a secret cult and a ritual dance practiced among the Chewa people, dating back to the great Chewa Empire of the seventeenth century (UNESCO, 2005). Gule Wamkulu has been classified by UNESCO as one of the 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2005). Nyau societies operate at the village level but are part of a wide network across the central region and part of the southern regions of Malawi, eastern Zambia, western Mozambique, and areas of Zimbabwe to which Malawians migrated (Ottenberg & Binkley, 2006).

Gule Wamkulu literally means "the big dance." The dancers (called *zilombo*, or wild animals) are dressed in ragged costumes of cloth and animal skins and wear masks made of wood and straw that represent a great variety of characters, such as wild animals, spirits of the dead, slave traders, and—more recently—objects such as helicopters (Bhanye & Dzingirai, 2020). Other cult members' dress code resembles the *nyama za ku tchire*, a feared animal that appears at the time of a person's death. There is a kind of hierarchy between the different animals, with some very respected animals such as *njobvu* (the elephant) and antelope, and feared ones like lions and hyenas (Harding, 2013). Each of these plays a particular, often evil, character that represents certain forms of misbehavior. At that moment in the performances and rituals, Nyau masked dancers are understood to be spirits of the dead. As spirits, the masqueraders may act with impunity (Ottenberg & Binkley, 2006).

The dreadful Nyau cultural traits are an indirect cultural form of resistance, or what James Scott terms "hidden transcripts," that provide the means to express emotions and make them collective (Scott, 1990). In southern Africa, Nyau's continued underground operation, mystery, and possible threat have enhanced its reputation for being a law unto itself. Ellen Gruenbaum (1996) explains that cultural practices serve a positive function in maintaining kin cohesion and ethnic identity, both of which are closely guarded and not easily changed. Ian Linden (2011) specifically points out that cultural practices, such as Nyau, are institutions of remarkable resilience and vitality that serve to unite the migrants in times of social stress and act as powerful curbs on the influence of foreign and dominant identities.

The Nyau Cult as a Form of Authority in Access to and Security Over Land

In Lydiate, the Nyau cult plays a significant role in advancing access to and security over land. This means that it facilitates migrants' security on the land for both settlement and small-scale agricultural production, sometimes at the expense of the indigenes. Through the cult, Lydiatians intimidate the indigenes into releasing part of their land for farming or settlement. The fear is usually targeted s the caretakers or managers of agro-residential plots and farms that surround the compound. Ustowardually, Nyau cult members choose public places to perform their almost supernatural dances and haunting, high-tempo drum rhythms. Occasionally, they move around from the cemetery making ghostly noises and usually end up close to areas that are occupied by the indigenes. The idea of launching their processions from the graveyard is meant to preserve the mystery surrounding the Nyau practice and to scare away non-Chewa people who might be tempted to intrude (Daimon, 2017). When performed at night, these processions scare the caretakers and owners of nearby plots. Because of these practices, the indigenous people are constantly reminded of the power of the occult. When cult members need land, either individually or collectively, it is easier for them to get it because of this fear they instill in the indigenes. This is well demonstrated by the case below.

In 2018, members of the cult targeted a nearby plot owned by Mr. Shumba. The plot is under the care of his 27-year-old caretaker, Edmore Zuze. Without seeking permission, the two members began planting sweet potatoes, the preferred food of the cult members. Fearing persecution and backlash from the cult, Edmore let the members be, even hiding from them. To this day, these members continue to use the plot for other purposes besides farming. Edmore said:

> Though I wanted to stop them, I could not. I knew I should not even touch them since they are members of the feared Nyau cult. I did not have any option but to let them be. I was afraid of contradicting them. I also told Mr. Shumba, my master, that the two women are not supposed to be touched since they practice the occult (E. Zuze, personal communication, June 5, 2018).

In a somewhat similar case, 28-year-old Peter Tinhirai, a caretaker at Mr. Zvarevashe's agro-residential plot, narrated how an active member of the Nyau cult had been farming on his landlord's plot for many years without permission. Peter confessed that both he and Mr. Zvarevashe are afraid of evicting the cult member (P. Tinhirai, personal communication, June 1, 2018). Rumors circulate that the cult members are brave enough to openly seize land and unleash their powers to cause harm to those who dare to confront them. In the end, caretakers and owners of nearby farms and agro-residential properties choose not to interfere with them.

The cult is clearly instrumental in generating land for some Lydiatians. In fact, this function is so important that many landless young men join the cult in order to secure land. This partly explains why the majority of the cult members are young, often between 14 and 35 years of age. During my study, I identified a number of young men who had already joined the cult to gain recognition and pave their way toward possessing their own physical space. In one case, 19-year-old Tawanda Mamvura stated that he had joined the cult at the age of 14 (T. Mamvura, personal communication, April 6, 2019). Dominic Njanji, a 22-year-old who joined the cult at a young age, had this to say:

> I started to participate in the Nyau dances from the age of 16. I joined the cult because I wanted to have respect in the community. If you are not initiated into the cult in this community, it is like you are a nobody here. You are not considered a man and getting physical space for settlement when you grow up might be difficult (D. Njanji, personal communication, April 4, 2019).

Membership in the cult is designed to secure land; once members of the cult become older and have secured their own physical settlement plots in the community, they often leave the cult. A good example is 35-year-old Gift Banda, who was once a very active member of the cult, but left it after securing his space in the compound. Gift now works as a taxi driver, moving between Norton and Lydiate. Gift narrated his story as follows:

> I was initiated into the Nyau cult at a very young age: 17. I became very active in the cult for close to 10 years, getting the attention of both the cult leaders and other traditional leaders in the community. When I got married at 27, it was very easy for me to get a portion of settlement land. From that time onwards, my focus moved from frequenting Nyau dances to looking for a livelihood outside the community. I left the dance floor for

> other upcoming youths. Currently, I spend most of my time driving a taxi to and from Norton town. Nevertheless, once a Nyau cult member, you always remain a member even though you no longer actively participate in the dances. The DNA is still in me (*zvichiri mandiri*) (G. Banda, personal communication, April 6, 2019).

The Nyau cult has also played a role in neutralizing female power over land matters through the Chewa matrilineal system. In Lydiate, women do not seem to join the Nyau cult, except for a few involved in intricate clapping, singing, dancing, chanting, and responding to the song of the masquerader. Because of the mystery and fear instilled by the male cult members, the female exclusion undercuts their traditional matrilineal control over land. Thus, the Nyau cult being a male-dominated secret society allows male Lydiatians to ritually gain increased importance on land issues, which are predominantly mediated among the Chewa people by a matrilineal system. In Lydiate, the power of the Nyau cult continues to ensure that relations between Chewa men and women—including land matters—remains ambivalent and negotiable.

The cult does not only facilitate securing individual land; more often than not, it also assists migrants—who are usually threatened by indigenes over patrimony—in holding on to their land. These indigenes want to monopolize the land that is currently occupied by the migrants. Indeed, it is no secret that indigenes perceive the migrants as squatters who should be removed in order to increase the value of their recently developed agro-residential plots (Shumba, personal communication, June 23, 2018).

It is against this background that the cult is invoked. Cult members define core Lydiate as a no-go area for other groups apart from Malawian migrants. This marking of territory is frequently done during the weekend through a dramatic procession that is organized around deathly practices. Members of the cult, dressed in phantom costumes of cloth and animal skins, present themselves as walking dead men. They transform themselves into masked white giants, standing or moving around on stilts that dwarf normal human beings. In their territorial marking mobility, they continuously mimic gestures of violence and threaten to beat up locals that come near Lydiate and its compound. The sophisticated, mysterious, and scary customs do not target fellow community members, but rather indigenous outsiders who are seen as potentially dangerous because they want to seize land from the migrants. Needless to say, the locals will not question the tenure of these Lydiatians.

My research has shown that the occult plays a significant role in securing land among Lydiatians. Many people use it to secure land that they would not otherwise have gotten. The agency of the Malawian diaspora in destination countries through the Nyau cult is not new. Since the colonial period, the Nyau cult has been a crucial component of Malawian diasporic agency and identity articulation in Zimbabwe and other southern African countries. Anusa Daimon (2015) asserts that Nyau has offered a platform and social networks to cope with the fears and problems induced by post-independent political turmoil, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP), droughts, and continued state alienation (Daimon, 2015; Delius & Phillips, 2014). What is new about the Nyau cult in this study is that its rich forms of mesmerizing nature and deathly symbols help to facilitate migrants' security over land in a hostile and foreign environment.

However, the occult has its own limitations. For example, it is not always effective in securing land for every cult member. During my research, I came across a few cases where migrants were dispossessed of their land despite being cult members. It also seems as if modern religions, particularly Pentecostalism, are now more preferable than traditional practices like the Nyau cult (Jeannerat, 2009). This can be ascribed to modern religious practices that allow for more social capital than the Nyau cult, which is associated with secrecy and seems to thrive by instilling fear among non-members. It was not surprising then that some cult members had dual membership—belonging to the cult while at the same time attending modern Pentecostal Christian churches. I came across cases where social networks that were developed through modern churches also facilitated security over land without any controversy. Some migrants, for example, easily retained their land through association with traditional leaders attending the same church.

In contemporary migration studies, the modern church plays a significant role in facilitating the integration of transnational migrants (Dzingirai et al., 2015; Goździak & Shandy, 2002; Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003; Landau & Freemantle, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). A study by Vupenyu Dzingirai et al. (2015) among Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa revealed that the church played a critical role in enabling people to help each other settle, find jobs, and connect to other migrants from their communities. Loren Landau and Iriann Freemantle (2010) observed that modern Pentecostal churches contribute to a broader approach to estuarial life that can be categorized as "tactical cosmopolitanism" and that

allows migrants to be in a place but to also be not of that place: to be neither host nor guest. It is also important to note that the existence of two parallel religious beliefs, such as the Nyau cult and modern religions, can serve as a barrier to the establishment of migrant communities, because the two can work in compelling, competing, and contradictory ways. It was common in Lydiate for non-cult members to stereotype cult members as dangerous and capable of causing harm. However, regardless of its shortfalls, the Nyau cult still plays a role in facilitating access to and security over land in Lydiate. The following section deals with witchcraft as a form of authority in securing land among Lydiatians.

Witchcraft as a Form of Authority in Securing Land

Lydiatians also make use of witchcraft to secure plots of land. While the Nyau cult is used to secure land against external threats, witchcraft is often used to protect an individual's land against fellow migrants. In contemporary African studies, the term *witchcraft* has been used to cover a variety of activities, often of the nefarious sort like black magic, mystical arts, spells, and enchantment (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; Geschiere, 1997; Gluckman, 2012; Moore & Sanders, 2003). Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1999) show that there is much witchcraft around the world, although it takes on a variety of local guises. Other scholars demonstrate how the African diaspora and squatter settlements are havens of witchcraft (Hickel, 2014; Moore & Sanders, 2003). In these communities, witchcraft has been used to cause harm to the innocent, take revenge against enemies, or protect one's assets or resources from dispossession, and as the Camaroff & Camoroff (1999) observed, it produces immense wealth and power—against all odds—at supernatural speed and with striking ingenuity.

During my ethnographic inquiry in the Lydiate community, rumors of witchcraft were common, especially in relation to resource security. Some of the Lydiatians convincingly talked about the squatter settlement being full of trenchant human evil and phantasmic forces of unprecedented power and danger. This power and danger often targeted fellow migrants to enforce land ownership. Land enforcement is done through threats of harm to other migrants. Owing to this fear of danger, people in the community do not encroach onto land that is not theirs, as there are unknown fatal consequences associated with such actions. During

my study, some community members openly talked about people in the community who could hurt others with witchcraft if they took their land. Especially among the younger generation of migrants, there are burgeoning fears that the older, first-generation Malawians in the community are able to cast spells of misfortunes—and in extreme cases, turn members of the community into zombies—if they were to ever encroach onto the spaces that these elders occupy. One of the migrants, Magret Petro, had this to say:

> Considering the complexity and size of this community, witchcraft happens. I remember a case when one hard-headed old woman seized another community member's portion of farmland. When she was asked to leave the land, she refused. She even threatened the other person with death until the person left her with the land (M. Petro, personal communication, April 8, 2019).

The use of witchcraft to secure land in the community was also revealed through an interview with Howard Chidyamakava, who said that

> cases of disputes, especially over both settlement and farmland are rampant in the community. In this community, if you are not careful of how you deal with other members over land issues, you will die; there is serious witchcraft. The Nyau (*zvigure*) dominate this community. People here live secret lives and you would not want to take someone's land if you do not really know the person well. You will be killed over such action if you are not careful (H. Chidyamakava, personal communication, April 8, 2019).

Because of witchcraft, the weak are left with little recourse but to protect or shield themselves by retreating. Some would even opt to lose their land to such people. The 29-year-old Maita Tambwe, for example, was honest enough to say that if she were threatened by witchcraft, she would certainly give the land to the original owner or the claimant (M. Tabwe, personal communication, April 8, 2019).

In another case, 39-year-old housewife Shawn Chikomo, had this to say:

> I used to have a small plot just across this community (*kwaNhau*) and I realized that someone had taken that plot. I did not try to argue with the person, since he is well known for witchcraft. This has happened to me twice. Instead, I just opted to go and find somewhere to farm since I fear

> people in this community. There are cults and witchcraft in this community. I remember one community member who was threatened with a lightning strike (*kuroveswa nemheni*) over a piece of land (S. Chikomo, personal communication, April 8, 2019).

Not everyone responded to threats of witchcraft by retreating. In some instances, those who are threatened also dared to fight back supernaturally. Julius Mulochwa, for example, told me that he vowed to turn the whole family of a fellow migrant into zombies after a dispute over a piece of farmland had led to the fellow migrant threatening to bewitch him and his family. Julius said,

> I was going to turn his whole family into zombies. He claimed my piece of land, which he clearly knew I have been using for the past three years. What baffled me was that he even threatened to bewitch my family if I failed to give up the land. After realizing that I was not backing off, he retreated and I kept my land.

Thus, as Mavhungu (2012) argues, witchcraft can be a mechanism for the expression and resolution of social tensions and conflicts over resources, although it often disturbs amicable social relations. In other studies (e.g., Dehm & Millbank, 2019; Schnoebelen, 2009) witches have often been found to be persecuted, while some claim refugee status on the basis of being bewitched by others.

In Lydiate, those who are threatened with danger sometimes turn the land dispute over to the community leaders. Getrude Chanza, a 29-year-old woman, invited one of the community leaders, Mr. Matambo, to resolve a land dispute that had erupted between her and an elderly woman who is well known for casting evil spells. To establish peace between the two parties, the community leader decided that the two would share the farmland by dividing it equally.

The evidence presented above demonstrates that migrants can establish themselves through very eccentric means, like witchcraft, regardless of the reluctance among scholars to admit that Africa is still home to practices of witchcraft in the accumulation and protection of resources. In Lydiate, witchcraft was used to secure land against fellow members in the community. Thus, witchcraft and enchantments are real and abundant in Africa; as demonstrated by the above findings, they are common practice in Africa's emerging urban communities. John Comaroff (1994) has even

argued that witchcraft is every bit as expansive and protean as modernity itself—thriving on its contradictions and silences, usurping its media, and puncturing its pretensions. Peter Geschiere (1997) also stressed that witchcraft abounds now and there is a dramatic rise in occult economies in Africa.

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that religious and ritual-based forms of authority—the Nyau cult and witchcraft—while not the only sources of access to and security over land, play a role in land matters. In Zimbabwe's Norton peri-urban area, Malawian migrants turn to the enchanting, dramatic, yet dreadful Nyau cult to access and reinforce their ownership of land. Because the cult is feared and respected by adherents on account of its association with deathly symbols, it is able to yield and secure land for those who seek it in its name. Others secure their land against expropriation from fellow migrants through the eccentric means of witchcraft. Migrants do not choose these alternative forms of authority out of preference; very often there are no formal institutions that they can turn to. The existing ones, like courts of law and local authorities, are often unsympathetic to their interests. Nevertheless, migrant squatter settlements have become dynamic spaces with novel forms of authority, such as witchcraft and the occult, regulating access over coveted resources. In terms of policy, this study recommends that there is a need for the state and other agencies involved in migration and peri-urbanity in Zimbabwe to come together and craft diverse policies and arrangements that make it possible for displaced migrants to have access to resources and entitlements that enable them to formally survive where they are located on a long-term basis. For now, migrants are left to depend on bizarre forms of authority, such as witchcraft and the occult, sometimes at a great cost to themselves.

Note

1. Demographic figures from the community register kept by community leaders, at Lydiate Farm, 2018.

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CHAPTER 6

Religion Constructed, Imagined, and Experienced: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Izabela Kujawa

One could expect my two field research trips to Turkey to be poles apart. In fact, many things have changed dramatically between the summers of 2019 and 2021. Covid-19 caused millions of deaths around the globe and seriously affected the health of many more. The pandemic has shaken the foundations of the world as we know it, leaving no place unwavering. And Turkey was no exception. Throughout this period, in order to limit the spread of the virus and avoid the overload of the healthcare system, the country deployed numerous means, among them a series of lockdowns and other restrictions. At the same time, as in other places around the world, Turkey has struggled to balance the indispensable carefulness with the desire of its people to live "normal lives."

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When I arrived in July 2021 in Gaziantep and later in Istanbul, both cities seemed to thrive again, even though caution was clearly evident. I went to Turkey to better understand the situation of Syrian refugees based there. From the start, I observed ceaselessly bustling presence of various civil society organizations supporting refugees. I hoped to explore their activities, as well as the motivations and values declared by their representatives, employees, and volunteers.

During both trips, I spent days traversing both locations, going from one interview to another, moving between stately headquarters of major international organizations and community centers run by neighborhood-based NGOs. During both trips, I passed by people in a rush and elements of urban landscapes no different from so many other places in the world. I also walked by unique pearls of architecture: beautiful mosques with their gleaming domes and slender minarets that have been there for hundreds of years and are still used as places of worship and spaces to socialize for local community members. Some of the mosques are located in close proximity to numerous new construction sites and mosques, which seem to have been just completed and opened to the worshipers. They drew my attention even more as my interlocutors often mentioned religion and gave their own meaning to these spaces and religious matters in general. Even though in an incomparably less abrupt and dramatic way, this has changed as well between my two visits: religion came up more often in the conversations during the second research trip. Some of the statements referred directly to the latest three major developments: the construction and opening of Turkey's new largest mosque—Grand Çamlıca Mosque in 2019, reconverting the Hagia Sophia and Kariye Museum into a place of Muslim worship in 2020, and the inauguration of a new mosque in Istanbul's central Taksim Square in 2021. National and international media commented extensively on these, deemed by many, controversial developments. In this chapter, I explore the historical antecedents of these events and try to make sense of the role religion plays in contemporary Turkey. While doing so, I put particular emphasis on religion's significance for the situation and experiences of Syrian refugees based there.

In the Face of the Syrian Civil War

When the violent conflict broke out in Syria in 2011, everybody expected that it would end soon just like the other uprisings in the region collectively labeled the "Arab Spring." The Turkish elites were among those

convinced that the situation in Syria would resolve itself fast and end the regime of Bashar Assad (Demirtaş, 2021).

In April 2011, Turkey under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), opened its doors to fleeing Syrians assuming they would soon return to their homes. It was estimated that around 100,000 people would come and leave the country within two to three weeks (Kaya, 2020). Those who crossed the border with Turkey were registered under the auspices of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), the representative of the state in the area of humanitarian help, and offered shelter, food, access to health services, and later also to education and vocational training. To this end, 22 temporary accommodation centers (camps) were set up in the border regions. At the same time, many Syrians chose to remain outside of these formal structures, settling in all major Turkish cities, a trend, which was further propelled by the 2018 decision to gradually close the camps. As a result, 98% of approximately four million Syrians became urban refugees (Kınıklıoğlu, 2020). In this context, the two cities chosen for the study seem to be of particular importance. Istanbul accommodates over 500,000 registered and many more unregistered Syrians, while Gaziantep became home to nearly 400,000 Syrians (who constitute 19% of the total population). Located in close proximity to the border, it became an important hub linking both sides and facilitating humanitarian help in the region.

Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Regarding Refugees. However, the country retained a geographical limitation making it possible only for people coming from European countries to receive refugee status. At the beginning of the conflict, while maintaining an open-door policy, Syrians were referred to as "guests" and did not have a formalized legal status. Various studies indicate the significance of the concepts of hospitality and deservingness and how they are linked to asylum and reception (Dimitriadi & Malamidis, 2020; Marchetti, 2020). Lamis Abdelaaty (2021) points out that such choice of labels in the Turkish case directs attention to the host's charity and hospitality rather than to the fulfillment of its legal obligations. As more and more Syrians sought protection from the deteriorating situation in their country, the Turkish government changed the legal framework to accommodate them. In October 2014, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation were put in place. These changes were accompanied by the establishment of the

new Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), which eventually became the main institution managing migration.

The newly created temporary protection measures were a major policy shift as they shielded Syrians against *refoulment* and allowed them at least theoretically to gain access to education, health care, and labor market. Tahir Zaman points out, however, that the temporal nature of the protection exposes the character of the offered support in which "the primary concern for the Turkish authorities is on *managing* displaced people rather than *protecting* them" (2016, p. 169). This newly created legal status does not provide long-term stability. While guarantying access to some rights, it nevertheless creates precarious conditions (Baban et al., 2017). My findings also demonstrate that such an approach hinders full integration.

Reception and Support

At the early stage of the reception, the state and its institutions were the sole providers of needed assistance. It came in a form of well-organized camps "in extremely good conditions, both in terms of infrastructure and their ability to meet societal needs" (Kaya, 2020). However, the vast majority of Syrians became urban refugees and relied on private housing and informal settlements. At first with no support from the state, they could only turn to civil society organizations (Yilmaz, 2019). With the arrival of the Syrians, many existing non-governmental organizations changed their focus to adjust to the newly emerging needs and many new programs were established. The presence of foreign, international organizations also increased. Together, they offered support addressing the most basic needs such as shelter and food. With time, they have also expanded their programs to cover areas such as legal assistance and help with registration, education and language, employment, and livelihood (Aras & Duman, 2019). Some of them were also involved in advocacy efforts.

The presence of international organizations though welcomed was approached by the Turkish government with suspicion and fear. In order to have an office in Turkey, they were required to obtain special permits and register their foreign employees. Moreover, they worked under close scrutiny, which tightened significantly after the failed 2016 coup. As a result of the introduced state of emergency, several major organizations were named a threat to national security and expelled, while permits of

others were not renewed (Boztaş, 2019). Nevertheless, intense cooperation and exchanges, as well as competition between local and foreign organizations resulted in an emergence of a vibrant civil society, which was farther propelled by funding provided by international donors who often required partnerships (Sunata & Abdulla, 2020). Also, the deal between the EU and Turkey struck in 2016, contributed greatly to further development of the local civil society. While the bargain was criticized by many for being incompatible with values claimed to be at Europe's core, it offered six billion euros for humanitarian assistance. It also urged the Turkish government to cooperate closely with diverse groups of civil society in order to gain legitimacy over such resources (Boşnak, 2021).

With time, the open-door policy turned into a more restrictive approach leading to the tightening of border controls, partial introduction of visas, and the construction of a border wall. Moreover, organizations active in the region reported cases where border guards shot at and blocked Syrians from entering Turkey and pressured them to return to the northern parts of Syria, controlled by the Turkish military forces instead (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). In the time of the pandemic, the government introduced further limitations. By October 14, 2021, 3,721,057 Syrians were registered in the country under the scheme of temporary protection (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2021).

The situation of the majority of Syrians remains very difficult as they face numerous challenges in trying to survive with no clear hope in sight. Civil society organizations fill the gaps between regulations and policies. In reality, accessing some rights might be very problematic if not impossible (Sunata & Tosun, 2019). The temporary protection could be revoked at any time. Very few refugees are granted citizenship, while the rest do not know what to expect in the future (Ineli-Ciger, 2017). These challenges notwithstanding, Turkey has provided tremendous help to asylum seekers at a time when many other countries did not get involved other than financially or at all. At the same time, Turkey has not only responded to the crisis happening at its doors but was also instrumental in shaping the situation in the region. Turkey provided political and military support to some Syrian opposition groups and aspires to play a leading role in Syria's post-war reconstruction following its neo-Ottomanist aspirations in the region (Bélanger & Saracoglu, 2019).

Between Religion and Secularism

After the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate in 1923, the Republic of Turkey was established. Mustafa Kemal, the first president introduced a range of reforms to turn the country into a modern, Western-oriented democracy with a secular constitution. As a result, Turkey has no official religion, and the basic law guarantees freedom of religion and conscience. Despite the fact that the majority of the Turkish population were Muslims, Islam was framed as something standing in the way of progress and its influence over the state's institutions was consistently erased. At the same time, such drastic measures contributed to the consolidation of opponents willing to fight for "more religion-friendly secularism" which led to open conflicts on how *laiklik*, the Turkish secularism, and the place of Islam and other religions within it are to be understood (Mustafa, 2019). One example of such debates was the "headscarf controversy," which began in the 1980s and referred to the presence of religious symbols at Turkish universities. The topic became a figurative manifestation of the polarization of Turkish society.

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the election and has stayed in power until the present day. Religion constitutes a central element of AKP's conception of the Turkish nation. With AKP in power, Sunni Islam is to a large extent organized and supported by the state. For instance, the Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet), responsible among other issues for the management of all mosques, has at its disposal an annual budget of over 2 billion USD and 120,000 employees (Howard, 2017). Furthermore, increasing funds are allocated to religious schools. The government also tries to affect the behavior of its constituents by discouraging alcohol consumption (for example). Construction of new mosques in symbolic, crucial places like central Taksim Square or Çamlıca Hill with a tremendous view or the re-establishment of Hagia Sophia as a mosque also speak to the increased role Islam is playing in Turkey.

Rhetoric Concerning Syrians

The notion of hospitality has been present in the public discourse in Turkey since the early days of the Syrian conflict and was often inspired by religion. It was stressed that migration was also a part of the history of Islam and the experience of the Prophet Muhammad—who fled Mecca

to Medina to seek refuge from religious persecution. Syrian migration to Turkey was depicted as a modern-day *hijrah* (migration) (Demirtaş, 2021). While addressing the situation of Syrians, President Erdogan repeatedly used the term *muhacir* (refugee) to recall Muslims who left Mecca and *ensar* (helper) to evoke people who welcomed them.

Religious rhetoric was used to encourage assistance to Syrian "Muslim brothers and sisters." At the same time, however, the religious affiliation of the majority of Syrians, as well as the constant emphasis on Sunni Islamic affinity was of concern to Erdogan's opponents and religious minority groups. Many believed that this approach was chosen not merely to help Syrian refugees, but also to change the religious demographics in order to emphasize Sunni national identity and gain political support from Syrian current and future voters (Abdelaaty, 2021).

Religion was not the only symbol used to encourage and strengthen people's openness towards refugees. Since 2002, a romanticized image of the Ottoman glory has been part of the AKP's political agenda. Hilal Alkan (2021) points out that references to the Ottoman past served to frame Syrians as part of the (former) empire, stress their geographic and religious proximity, and thereby evoke feelings of paternalistic responsibility.

The two described main frames of reference—related to religion and to the Ottoman Empire—do not exhaust the range of employed rhetorical figures. In contrast to the religious and nationalist approaches, other groups and public figures raised the issue of solidarity, justice, and human rights (Boşnak, 2021).

The Turkish government's rhetoric promoting outright openness to refugees was quite prominent, especially in the initial phase of refugee reception. Over time, the government emphasized Turkey's generosity and juxtaposed it with Europe's indifference if not hostility, especially towards Islam and its followers (Iscan, 2021). The positive self-representation and the construction of Europe as the hostile, intolerant Other allowed AKP to discursively "claim moral superiority," especially when the weight of the economic burden constituted by refugees' presence was repeatedly raised (Polat, 2018).

Lived Experiences: Religion That Connects

Religion and religious symbolism were highly visible in the public discourse. They were tangibly transformed into actions on the ground,

at the national or municipality levels. Also, institutions in charge of religious matters were very much involved in providing support to refugees. For instance, Diyanet, the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs, was assigned the task of promoting hospitality and openness towards Syrians among Turks. At the same time, the agency provided aid and religious education to Syrians both in Turkey and Syria (Demirtaş, 2021). Furthermore, major faith-based organizations, often with direct support from the state, have also been very active. As they shared conservative views with the government, they were often preferred as partners over groups, which promoted more liberal, secular values (Boztaş, 2019). Didem Danış and Dilara Nazlı (2019) describe this arrangement as "faithful alliance" due to the religious references at its core and loyalty characterizing organizations, which assume a subordinated, supportive role in relation to the state.

I had a chance to witness the mobilization of faith-based organizations during the celebration of Kurban Bayramı (*Eid al-Adha* in Arabic). The holiday is reminiscent of the story of Abraham, who, showing his complete devotion to God, was ready to sacrifice his own son. In accordance with the tradition, an animal should be slaughtered and shared between family, friends and relatives, and those in need demonstrating people's commitment to charity. Nowadays, many Muslims, especially those from large urban centers, rather than to carry out the tradition in a literal sense, choose to donate money. When I arrived in Turkey, several faith-based organizations I approached were busy collecting such donations dedicated specifically for Syrians.

Also, much smaller organizations and informal solidarity networks were actively engaged in providing help. In fact, local faith-based charity organizations supported Syrian refugees by collecting and distributing the most needed things and assisting them since the earliest days. Everyone who declared to be motivated by religion emphasized that they provided help to all refugees, no matter their religious affiliation, focusing especially on bringing relief to the most vulnerable. Sözer (2019), while indicating the very problematic nature of the notion of vulnerability and thereby the necessity for its cautious application, demonstrates that the religious background of some organizations might not be entirely insignificant. For the Turkish religiously motivated networks she studied, vulnerability had nationalistic and religious undertones, as for them, the most vulnerable were the women and children whose closest relatives were "martyrs."

Families of Muslim men who lost their lives fighting on the "right side" of the Syrian conflict were the first to receive support.

Some networks of support were totally informal. They were formed within neighborhoods, often based on the closest ties with family members and friends. They were often first to react to the most urgent needs of refugees (Alkan, 2021). One of my interlocutors summed up succinctly the initial openness by saying: "People saw welcoming Syrians as a right thing to do. They were perceived as their Muslim brothers and sisters."

Hospitality was therefore not merely a rhetorical tool. It was something people enacted in concrete settings, in ways they chose and could afford. Religion became a source of inspiration and encouragement. It also allowed seeing Syrians not as "Others," but as someone familiar given the common religious affiliation. Also, Syrians who found religion important were able to search for familiarity in mosques and feel more at home. One of the interviewed Syrians in Gaziantep admitted: "Mosques are the most important place, place where people have a chance to meet, where problems are solved. It would be very difficult without them."

One of the Syrian women I had a chance to talk to while visiting Çamlıca Mosque explained that she was very grateful to Erdogan for letting her and her family be there and assured me that she would not want to go anywhere else as she wanted her children to grow up in a Muslim country. Similarly, participants of the Cultural Orientation (CO) programs organized by international organizations for those in the process of resettlement perceived religion and issues stemming from religious beliefs as a main difference between residing in Turkey and in a third country. Interviews with CO facilitators demonstrate that questions related to the possibility to practice one's religion freely and still being accepted were raised in every training group.

Lived Experiences: Beyond Faith

While religion inspired many concrete actions, it is not the only source of motivation to act. Many organizations that are not faith-based chose to respond to the emerging crisis. One of the representatives of a well-established civil society organization recalled in an interview:

> NGOs in Turkey, no matter their profile, were always there to organize help in case of crises. Up until then it meant they were needed to cope with

> the aftermath of earthquakes. For us, the refugee crisis was something very similar that is an urgent matter, something to respond to. The problem is that no one has expected that the situation would turn into a kind of "permanent crisis."

Many interlocutors talked about "permanent crisis," stressing the fact that many years passed since the war in Syria begun, there are still no future-oriented policies, which would allow people to feel safer and more settled and let the NGOs plan their work better. While many underscored that the introduction of the temporary protection legal framework constituted a major policy shift, they also expressed great disappointment. One person explained:

> For now, people are in limbo, they don't know what will happen to them. What we try to do is give them some skills so that they have a job in Turkey, something they can use when they are back in Syria or in Europe or wherever. So, this is what you can do, at least this, give them some skills.

Some of the interviewed organizations clearly position themselves as entities promoting and acting upon values different from those supported by the government. The stressed difference lies on the axis of religion and secularity:

> Now government has some projects that provide "value training," and these values are of course about Islam, not about human rights or anything like this, nothing that our secular organization would teach about.

Several organizations pointed out that non-religious organizations face many challenges. Many of the interviewed service providers mentioned feeling a sense of constant control. In addition, other reports describe the relation between the civil society and the state as "complicated," as the former encounters "repression, and bureaucratic and legal restrictions" (Aras & Duman, 2019, p. 3). One such restriction concerns education: NGOs cannot provide educational activities unless the organization is certified by the Ministry of Education.

While religion is crucial to some, others are guided by different values or ideas. A young Syrian volunteer in an international organization in Istanbul described that for him the sense of freedom, the chance

to gain formal education, but also to learn from other people representing different worldviews constitute the highest value. Being involved in helping not only allows him to regain his agency, but also build ties with like-minded people.

Another young Syrian man interviewed in Gaziantep, while stressing that being a Muslim is important to him, also underlined that he built his relations not necessarily through the mosque, but through the university. He speaks perfect English and Turkish and spends his time learning to code in a class where the majority are female students. He is among the lucky ones: only very recently he found out that he has been granted Turkish citizenship. My conversation with him not only indicated that religion is not always at the center of the sense of belonging or attempts to build it. It also hinted at the fact that sometimes it might still not be enough if concrete, potent and well-fitting actions facilitating integration are not in place. While admitting the difficulties, he still celebrated the chances offered in Turkey. At the same time, he confessed that his father has really hard time adjusting. He complains about the frivolous lifestyles people lead in Turkey, and that the Turks are not religious enough.

Summary

The multitudinous influences of Islam are clearly visible in contemporary Turkey. The country is shaped by the ruling party's decisions, which position religion at the center of its values and nation-building project. It is no wonder that Islam also played a significant role in the public discourse about Syrians seeking refuge from the war and persecution in Syria. Religious references promoted hospitality and openness. These, in turn, brought about concrete even if not fully sufficient changes in the law and actions to respond to people's needs. As a result, the Turkish government followed an open-door policy and introduced temporary protection measures.

With time, religion ceased to be solely an impulse to provide basic humanitarian assistance and turned into search for more durable solutions, even if still rather timid ones. Religion became a common ground for some Turks and Syrians. Mosques and spaces created by faith-based organizations allowed for the discussions on how to solve common problems and build communal life.

At the same time, many refugees received support from groups motivated by secular values, focused on the promotion of solidarity, social

justice, and human rights. For these activists, as well as refugees receiving support, not religion, even if sometimes still found important, but rather the attachment to these values constituted the common ground.

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PART III

Faith and Faith Actors in Responses to Forced Migration

CHAPTER 7

We Shall Overcome: A Case Study of the LGBT Asylum Task Force, a Parish Ministry

Max Niedzwiecki

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of the LGBT Asylum Task Force ("the Task Force"), a ministry of Hadwen Park Congregational Church, UCC in Worcester, Massachusetts, which is the only group in the United States that is dedicated to providing wrap-around services, including housing, to LGBT asylum seekers. Since its inception in 2008, it has provided services to over 219 people from 24 countries.

I first became acquainted with the Task Force in 2012 when I was coordinating the LGBT Faith (later "Freedom") and Asylum Network (LGBT-FAN), of which the Task Force was an active and early member. Over the years I have made modest financial and volunteer donations to

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them. My writing is informed by the knowledge I have gained through this relationship over the past decade, as well as data I gathered through interviews and the review of existing documents and recordings. In some cases, I have used pseudonyms and omitted or changed details about interviewees' stories in order to preserve their anonymity.

In this account, I make extensive use of quotations from Task Force leaders and clients. In general, I prefer not to repeat, analyze, or reinterpret what they say, but to let their words remain authoritative. Before delving into the case study per se, I present background information on religion and forced migration as they relate to LGBT people.

LGBT Asylum Seekers and Religion

Religion is a double-edged sword for many LGBT asylum seekers. Religious institutions and motivations are responsible for much of the abuse they experience. At the same time, religion provides many asylum seekers with comfort and hope, and aids their recovery. This dichotomy has been described in terms of contradictory conceptions of the divine that coexist within and among religious communities (McGuirk & Niedzwiecki, 2017). It can be seen both on the level of religion described as systems of doctrines and institutions, and on the level of so-called "lived religion," which emphasizes everyday practice and experience (see Ganzevoort & Sremac, 2019).

The proposition that religion is implicated in the need for many LGBT people to flee is well established. The UNHCR (2012, p. 42) has noted that "Where an individual is viewed as not conforming to the teachings of a particular religion on account of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, and is subjected to serious harm or punishment as a consequence, he or she may have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of religion."

John Marnell (2021) has shown how religious institutions and concepts are often mobilized against LGBT people in order to support the aims of those whose authority is buttressed by patriarchal ideologies that are depicted as traditional, natural, and divinely ordained. Concerns about cultural self-determination and globalization often accompany calls for a return to idealized ways of thinking and living. These campaigns can serve to unite religious and ethnic factions against scapegoats, and thus support social cohesion for the majority while subjecting LGBT

people to abuse. Anti-LGBT religious campaigns have also been characteristic of broader calls to violence: For example, in March of 2022 the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church framed his country's invasion of Ukraine as a virtuous repudiation of "the West's" degeneracy, as signaled by acceptance of LGBT rights (Morton, 2022). Theological and political discourses about sexual orientation and gender identity are tightly interwoven, and have repercussions of the highest magnitude.

At least 67 member states of the United Nations explicitly criminalize same-sex relationships, including five that impose the death penalty (Mendos et al., 2020), while at least six nations outlaw certain forms of gender expression (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). Governments often describe these laws as curtailing offenses against religion, but legal codes do not define the limits of persecution, as LGBT people are often subject to the selective application of laws that officially target morality more broadly (ORAM, 2012) (Photo 7.1).

Photo 7.1 Task Force pride march participants often hide their faces in order to highlight the violence faced by LGBT people in clients' countries of origin

Abuse and social exclusion often continue in refugee camps and resettlement countries. For example, a recent study of Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya documents claims of physical assault against 80 percent of self-identified LGBT refugees and cites religion as a motivating factor (Ndiritu, 2021). "Homophobia travels," in the words of the Rev. Judith K. Hanlon ("Pastor Judy"), the pastor of the parish that houses the Task Force. In the U.S. and elsewhere, LGBT asylum seekers are made more vulnerable by their continuing isolation from their ethnic communities and families.

Nevertheless, religion and spirituality continue to be important for many LGBT asylum seekers. What Marnell (2021, p. 3) writes about the clients of the LGBT Ministry at Holy Trinity Roman Catholic parish in Johannesburg, South Africa, applies equally to many of those at the Task Force:

> Despite being exposed to a wide range of harmful practices – everything from hate-filled sermons to forced exorcisms and physical assaults – LGBT people continue to draw strength from faith, even when excluded from formal religious spaces… [In so doing they are] redefining what faith can and should mean.

Task Force leaders and clients often make reference to a principle that reappears again and again in all flavors of religion that affirm LGBT people: Love your neighbor (Marnell, 2021; McGuirk & Niedzwiecki, 2017). A gay Muslim asylum-seeker client from Uganda expressed it this way:

> There can be two points. One: There is no way religion cannot be siding with LGBTQ. The reason being, it's religion that really preaches about love, and you will find that the two greatest arguments in Christianity, one stating that love God, and the second one saying love yourself as you love your neighbor. So, you will find that the word "love" is emphasized. That's Christianity. And in the Islamic faith, also love is emphasized in various suras of the Koran. So, there is no way you can say that you will not side with the people who love themselves.

Al Green, who arrived at the Task Force as a client and now serves as the Ministry Director, explains his own thoughts about religion:

> A lot of the hurt and the harm that's been done has been at the hands of human beings who were flawed, who have their biases that permeate their teachings and the way they interact with individuals… I create that distinction between what someone thinks their holy scripture says and how they decide to enact that, and what the scriptures actually say and the context within which they were written, and what was in essence the theme of how it is that God has interacted with folks.

For those LGBT asylum seekers who do redefine and embrace religion—and it must be said that a large percentage of LGBT asylum seekers do not—it can become a source of psychological healing. Like forced migrants more broadly, many who are LGBT struggle with mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, and substance abuse (White et al., 2019).

While the integration of spirituality in mental health treatment for trauma survivors is far from universal, a growing body of literature asserts that "PTSD … is a spiritual diagnosis and that spiritual components need to be part of the treatment protocol" (Goździak, 2017, p. 124). Religion can support psychological healing through integration with therapy (see Harper & Pargament, 2015; Pearce et al., 2018), but not only through those means. Writing about the Metropolitan Community Church of North London, Jordan Dyck (2019, pp. 43–44) shows how faith-based groups can provide environments where asylum seekers are "loved and accepted," and that "being part of an LGBT-affirming faith community … helps to heal the psychological damage of homophobic teachings one may have experienced in one's upbringing … and helps to counteract the effects of homophobic preaching that may well still be heard in other religious settings." Dustin and Held (2021, p. 209) show how faith-based organizations are a "key source of personal support and connection with others." These themes are echoed in the case study that follows.

Al Green reflects on how faith supports healing and community within the Task Force:

> You have folks who, all that they've heard back home is that there's something that's wrong with them, that they're abhorrent … unnatural, and most of it is coming from religion. But, like myself, many still have a strong sense of faith in spite of all of what we've heard from religious leaders in our own countries. And it is that faith that, when it gets tough, carries us through those periods. When we get here and we find a faith community that supports us, that practices a form of faith that is similar to

> ours, that doesn't think that we are abhorrent and unnatural, and instead are to be celebrated, it is like a breath of fresh air, it's like a spring in the middle of the desert. In many ways it is healing. I've experienced that for myself.

Finally, religion is important to LGBT asylum seekers because it motivates others to help them (see UNHCR, 2013). What the Rev. Canon Dr. Kapya Kaoma (2021, p. x) says about the African context applies more broadly:

> In speaking to the universal, religion has the potential to provide the clearest vision of authentic humanity – as long as it is planted with the moral imperative for equality and justice. When this is done, Christians, for example, begin to associate the suffering of Jesus with the suffering of oppressed peoples. Thus, the fight for human rights becomes a religious issue.

Here is how Pastor Judy explains her own motivation:

> I was born white in the United States of America... I am just oozing with privilege, although sometimes I get frustrated with my personal life, but how can I share this [with asylum seekers] without making them feel less than me, or beholden to me? I have to work hard on that… [Someone said recently,] 'Pastor Judy, you're my savior, you're my mother.' I go, 'No. No, Jesus called me to do this, and that's all. And Jesus will call you to do something like this too down the road, and then you'll do it with joy. You don't owe me anything.'

LGBT People and Forced Migration

LGBT people are represented among all categories of people who are subject to forced migration, which is defined by the International Organization for Migration (2019, p. 77) as "a migratory movement which … involves force, compulsion, or coercion." In the American context, forced migrants include: *refugees* who have been certified as such outside of the United States by the U.S. Government and then helped to resettle in the United States; *human trafficking victims* who have been moved to the U.S. through deception or under coercion and then exploited; *undocumented immigrants* who lack legal status to remain in the U.S.; *asylum seekers* who apply for protection at a U.S. border or within the

U.S.; *asylees*, who have been granted permission to remain in the country permanently; and *other immigrants* who arrive through the full variety of legal channels that are not explicitly related to forced migration. Most of the Task Force's clients enter the U.S. with student, work, or travel visas. Since the Task Force focuses on working with asylum seekers, they will remain the focus below.

LGBT people face particular difficulties in the asylum process: Many are afraid or ashamed to talk about intimate matters. It can also be difficult to "prove" LGBT status. Many became skillful at keeping their sexual orientation and gender identity hidden in order to survive, and took great pains to hide or destroy any documentary evidence that might have existed. In addition, much of the persecution suffered by LGBT people takes place behind closed doors, and is never acknowledged in the public sphere (Dustin & Held, 2021).

It is unclear how many LGBT forced migrants apply for, or are granted, asylum in the U.S. on an annual basis. Asylum claims made by LGBT people are not always identified as such in official records. Additionally, applicants may choose to base their claims on other factors such as membership in a political, ethnic, or religious group that has been persecuted in their home country. The Organization for Refuge, Asylum, and Migration (2012) estimates that 5 percent of U.S. asylum seekers are LGBT. Given the total number of asylum applications received in the three most recent federal fiscal years for which data are available (Baugh, 2020), 14,229 LGBT people would have applied for asylum in 2017, 13,470 in 2018, and 15,385 in 2019.

Once granted asylum, individuals are eligible to work legally in the U.S., and to make use of the full range of government-supported programs and benefits. Until that time they are ineligible for most forms of support, although institutions may use non-federal funds to help them. Access to such support is inconsistent across states, and relatively generous in Massachusetts. Asylum seekers can apply for work authorization 150 days after filing their asylum applications, and then must wait at least 30 days, and often much longer, before receiving permission to work (Immigration Equality, n.d.; Niedzwiecki, 2014). This places many in a difficult position, particularly given the social isolation they experience.

Profile of the LGBT Asylum Task Force

The social isolation faced by many LGBT asylum seekers intensifies the needs they experience by virtue of their immigration status. As Ministry Director Al Green states, "Many people find themselves in some very, very bad situations, and being abused and taken advantage of just so they can have a roof over their heads and food to eat" (University of Southern Maine, 2020). Despite this widespread need, the Task Force remains the only structured program in the country that is dedicated to providing wrap-around services including housing to this population. Legal, health, employment, housing, language access, and education programs are among the more commonly provided services targeted to LGBT immigrants (Gruberg et al., 2018), but housing and income support remain exceedingly rare.

Development of the Task Force

The Task Force developed without reference to a preset plan. Prior to its establishment, the Pastor of Hadwen Park Congregational Church, the Rev. Judith K. Hanlon ("Pastor Judy") had become an advocate for marriage equality. In her words:

> My … clergy colleague … said, 'You know why we have this problem: it's because of religious abuse. If we pulled the 'God said that gays are bad' out of all of this, we wouldn't be having this problem.' And I essentially remember standing there going, 'Holy shit, that's my arena.' And so I became affiliated with the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry, and I began to march on the Boston State House… That, right there, was the seed for the LGBT Asylum Task Force.

In 2008, a new mission knocked on the parish's door in Worcester, Massachusetts, in the person of Linford Cunningham, an asylum seeker who would later become one of the Task Force's leaders. His lawyer had referred him, as Pastor Judy explains:

> He had no food, he had no place to live, and he did believe, based on what the pastors in Jamaica said, that God hated him and he was cursed... So [the lawyer] said, 'Oh, I remember the newspaper where this Christian pastor was loudly in favor of equal marriage…' So, she sent Linford to Hadwen Park Church. She called me and said, 'He's on his way,' and I

> met him, we went to our terribly bland food pantry, gave him cereal and anything we could do, and got some money out of our church benevolence fund... And it was just in some really simple way what churches do. When somebody comes who's hurting – we're so much better at hospitality than we are at justice, though you might define hospitality as justice, but anyway, he came to church and told his story. And we just passed the hat, and got enough money for his rent.

As the congregation began to help Linford, Pastor Judy led them in the process of learning about the plight of people like him. At the same time, she created a basis for continued commitment by cultivating the understanding that helping LGBT asylum seekers could provide important ways for them to live out their Christian faith.

The religious responsibility to love one's neighbors, particularly those who are in great need, has been cited above. In addition, Pastor Judy makes reference to the biblical responsibility to provide sanctuary for those fleeing violence (Roberge, 2015). Her most consistent themes are Grace and miracles. She sees herself and her flock as miraculous instruments of Grace, which she defines as "unmerited favor" with God as its source. Here she talks about how she sees Grace flowing through her community:

> One of the [asylum seekers] from Nigeria … came to church … and one day I said in a sermon, 'Jesus came to set the prisoners free' – you know the Isaiah stuff – and that stuck with him. I had no idea, but he has … already done two years of prison ministry, on his own without telling anybody, just because we gave that Grace to him, and he wanted to give it back, and he heard that word in church, and that struck him as his call. That blew me away. It made me feel really humble. This is God's work.

The concept of "welcome" is also very important. The central idea of the "Welcoming Church Movement," in which Hadwen Park Church participates, is that Christians should extend hospitality toward LGBT people precisely because they experienced "religious abuse," to borrow the term used by Pastor Judy (National LGBTQ Task Force, n.d.). This hospitality must extend beyond politeness and include the possibility of a relationship marked by mutual love and respect. The United Church of Christ, Hadwen Park's denomination, describes itself as "a distinct and diverse community of Christians that come together as one church united in

Spirit to love all, welcome all and seek justice for all" (United Church of Christ, 2022). This framing has continued to drive the congregation's commitment.

The Task Force's activities developed gradually. After the initial engagement, Pastor Judy began to cultivate a core group of parishioners to take leadership. Simultaneously, she began to pull back from day-to-day operational involvement while continuing her preaching, spiritual leadership, and faith counseling. Word spread about the program, and as Pastor Judy says, more people began to arrive:

> It was so organic... Some of Linford's friends in Jamaica heard that Worcester was a place where they could be safe, and loved by a Christian church, and supported with food and housing. So, they came ... And first we put people in two church ladies' houses... As the money came in, we began to pay some rent... And as the rent grew, we got an apartment that we rented... And as the people came, we found places for them.

Clients typically learn about the Task Force through its website or word-of-mouth. Their paths to Worcester are often circuitous. The case of Irene is instructive. In her native Uganda, she was branded as possessed by the devil and then forcibly married. After she and her young child escaped her abusive marriage, she found a job at an organization that was targeted by the government as pro-LGBT, as a result of which she was arrested and abused by police. With a visa she had obtained from her ex-employer she fled to the U.S. where she was housed by a friend of a friend. It became impossible for her to stay, and again she fled with her child. In her own words (Nuñez, 2021):

> So, this one time I woke up in the morning in a lot of pain. I couldn't even walk at that point and I see a message saying 'Hello' … It was [my friend] … So, I told him 'I'm not happy where I am right now, and I don't have anywhere to go, and do you know anyone who can help me.' … He said, 'Yes, there's a big Ugandan community in Worcester and if you'd like I'll just take you and you'll meet other people, and maybe they can help you.' I said 'fine.' And I remember deep inside me I was just like, 'Let me just go, you know I'm not gonna tell anyone that I'm not gonna come back. I'm just gonna go and I won't come back.' … When we came [to Worcester] there were all these, you know, people who were just proud being gay, and you know when you meet Ugandans and they're proud to be gay, it's different, very different. From where we come from,

> we can't talk about things like that. We're so much told to keep everything inside, and I met people who were just openly gay and they would tell you, discuss all these things, and I was just so scared, you know, even telling anyone… But when they started opening up, I told [them] my story and they said 'Wait, you don't need to go back.' The thing that I wanted to hear: you don't need to go back. 'We know an organization that can help you. It helps asylum seekers, LGBT people, and they can find you a place to stay.'

The story provided by Abdul, who is also from Uganda, underscores how chance and unlikely encounters lead many people to the Task Force:

> I come into this mosque, and then in this mosque I meet the imam … and he introduced me to the board of the leaders of their community…. So, through this Ugandan community board of Muslims I meet a man, a gentleman who was very nice to me, who was very caring, and this man introduced me to the rabbi of the Jewish community in Concord. So, while we were meeting with the rabbi, the rabbi gave me a big number of connections… [and] connected me to the Boston Medical Center, which Boston Medical Center helped me in acquiring an attorney… It was one party leading me to another party, leading me to another party. So, I happened to have gotten a team in a very short period of time. So, the team at Boston Medical connected me to some attorney... [who] was actually demanding some money which I didn't have... I told him that, 'You know what, I just landed here, I'm not working, it's really hard for me.' So he advised me, but with his kind heart … he connected me to some law firm here in Massachusetts which was pro bono… They really, really helped me out, because … while I was in their offices, they searched about the gay communities in Massachusetts, and discovered that one was in Worcester. And that's how I come to know about the Hadwen Park Church.

As more people arrived, Pastor Judy encouraged participation in public events that would provide a "witness" to the world—another important Christian concept—that their faith was calling the community to act on behalf of LGBT asylum seekers. This witnessing has included regular participation in Boston Pride parades, the launching of a website, pursuit of coverage in newspapers and on radio, and speaking in the worship services of other congregations.

> What really enabled us to grow from … the asylum-seekers finding us – was a website… The organization grew, as I said, organically, and we had to get in touch with other churches because we couldn't handle this. So we got an article in some church newsletters … We went everywhere to speak … we went to Chicago, we went to San Diego, and the United Church of Christ … found us money to take our people on the road.

Although the Task Force has continuously been housed at Hadwen Park Church, questions arose about the form that relationship should take. In part because of the need to raise funds from donors who were leery about supporting faith-based groups (see "Challenges," below), the group decided to pursue a more secular direction. Pastor Judy explains:

> We weren't interested in a large system, but we did feel that we needed a person to direct it. So we hired someone, and the first thing that person did was to want to separate it from the church. So we walked that journey, and I kept saying, 'We are here, essentially, because of religious abuse. The Church knows it, we understand it fundamentally, we understand it from a theological point of view, and in this church I don't want to be an agency'... So I pushed against it, but we went that direction for a while, and then something happened... [After a volunteer had stolen several checks,] we realized that the entity that was at risk was Hadwen Park Church. So at that point we pulled everything back into the church. So presently the financial team that does the church books does the LGBT Task Force work… We feel so much safer about that. The other thing that happened was that we had to vote on it, it became a part of the congregational meeting, and the church became much, much, much more invested…
>
> And now, related to the religious situation, I don't ever want [the Task Force] to be outside of the church. We have 300 members that will take you shopping if you get to know them. I don't have to know about that. It's amorphic. If you meet people at the coffee hour and they become your friends … they will help.

As the Task Force became more firmly rooted in the congregation and more clients arrived, staffing infrastructure continued to develop. Linford Cunningham, the person whose call for help had sparked the development of the group, took leadership early on and continues to be involved. Al Green tells how his leadership role developed in 2016:

> I got referred by … a pro bono legal network in Boston... I spent a year being supported by the Task Force, and then also during that year got really involved with the church and joined a bunch of committees, and one of them was the Personnel Committee… We were tasked with finding a Ministry Director... And we went through a six-, seven-month process, identified a couple of candidates who eventually turned down the offer for other better-paying options. And we were faced with having to start the whole process over, and no one really had an appetite for that. And one question was put to me whether I would be willing to step into the role. I had been doing some of this stuff before – helping out with events and a little bit of fundraising as well… I'm like, I'm here – money isn't everything, it's important, but it's not everything – and I have the opportunity to assist and to make an impact, and so I'm going to give it a try for the next few years.
>
> I often tell folks that life here is short. And I think that in order for us to make sense out of life and to have some meaning that we should do whatever we can to help people who are less well-off than we are… It's not that we aren't in need of assistance ourselves, but if we have the capacity to help other people who are less well-off than we are … it's our responsibility. I think that's what we're called to do. Part of what drew me to Hadwen Park Church was the fact that it wasn't just like any other church where they would tell you what to do on a Sunday but that outside of that they weren't necessarily practicing what they preached. It was different. Their faith was put into action… That definitely resonated with my faith, knowing it's motivating what we're called to do: to take care of the marginalized within our society.

Operations and Achievements

As the Task Force has become more visible, it has also become more structured in terms of range of services, partnerships, operations, personnel, expectations, and record-keeping. Since 2008, it has provided services to 219 LGBT asylum seekers from 24 countries, with 65 percent of them coming from Jamaica or Uganda. Approximately 70 percent have been cisgender male, 25 percent cisgender female, and 5 percent transgender or nonbinary. About half had some university education and an additional 40 percent had graduated from high school.

The group's leadership includes the Pastor of Hadwen Park Congregational Church, the Ministry Director and Associate Ministry Director (both asylum seekers/asylees), a Fundraising Committee, and the Chair of the parish's Steering Committee. Pastor Judy focuses on leading

the church as well as spiritual guidance and counseling for those who request it. The others interact with asylum seekers and ensure that their housing, legal, healthcare, and transportation needs are met. They also work with donors, plan fundraising and programmatic events, act as property superintendents, coordinate volunteer activity, and do administrative work. Asylum seekers, members of the congregation, and others volunteer by providing transportation and landscaping services, sharing their meals, and giving advice. Storytelling, as described below, is an important volunteer function for many asylum seekers.

Housing has been a central service of the Task Force since its inception. As of April 2022, it provides housing to twenty-four people in seven apartments and one house which was bought and rehabilitated in 2021. In some cases, it arranges and pays for clients to live in private homes. At least one member of the leadership team meets with each housing group monthly. Each client has their individual room, which has a lock on the door. Rules include no loud music after 10:00 p.m. and no overnight guests.

Clients also receive monthly stipends of $650 to cover food and other basic expenses. They continue to receive support for three months after they have been granted legal permission to work. This typically means that they receive assistance for 18–24 months.

Many of the services clients depend on are provided by partner organizations. Limited healthcare is available through MassHealth Safety Net. Medical and mental health care, which are generally not discussed with Task Force personnel, are provided by the Family Health Center. Pro bono legal services are provided by a network of attorneys and organizations, many of them located in Boston. While most clients are fluent in English when they arrive, they can participate in language and other classes at the Ascentria Care Alliance.

Challenges

Some of the Task Force's persistent challenges relate to work with clients, and others are more institutional in nature. Several of them have important religious aspects.

Much of Pastor Judy's work centers on helping clients to overcome self-loathing and shame, which she considers to be rooted in religious abuse. In her own words:

> I do a lot of counseling … because the self-loathing is there. There are a few that are less connected to the church who tend not to feel so damned by God, but lots of the women can barely say the world 'lesbian'... So we just talk to them, and we say … 'You are fearfully and beautifully made in the image of God.' And I pray with them, and I talk to them, and it's slow, but … it helps them when they get to their immigration hearing. If they go to an immigration hearing and the officer asks 'Are you a lesbian?' and they go 'Yeah' timidly [then they're less likely to be believed]. And, you know, we actually practice [saying] it – I do, with some of the women, who are just so shamed by all they've been through.
> So, it is still a very big problem, and … I say, 'How do you feel about yourself in the eyes of God?' And, most of them, you know: 'Well, I tried, I prayed, I went to prayer meetings, I tried to un-gay myself, so I just have to say, you know, there are other sins too.' And I say 'No-no-no-no-no-no. This is not a sin. Your created identity is not a sin!'

Building trusting relationships is another persistent challenge. Al Green explains:

> 80-plus-percent of folks are really quiet at first, and understandably so. It's probably because they're just unsure of the situation, unsure that it's real. There are folks who [are] … wondering if it's a scam, if it's just a church that is trying to find gay people and hurt them. So oftentimes folks are quiet, they don't want to share all the details… For many, at first, it feels like it's too good to be true. It's contrary to everything they've heard before getting here, and it takes a while for folks to accept it within themselves that this faith community is legit, and that they actually are OK in the eyes of God.

Pastor Judy provides a more concrete example:

> Recently after coffee hour, we sat and talked one afternoon, five or six asylum seekers and three church members, and they started talking about how afraid they were to come to us because this was a church… and one of them said, 'I have to tell you, I really wondered. Everybody was so good to me. They went out and bought me a cell phone … they gave me $500.' And he said, 'I would wake up at night thinking they're really trafficking us.'

Fundraising is an ever-present challenge. The Task Force needs to raise approximately $40,000 per month. Government funding is not available

because most asylum seekers are barred from federally funded programs. Consequently, the group depends on support from private donors.

The Task Force relies heavily on funding from individuals, including the 300-odd members of the congregation, donors from around the world who learn about the group through mass media, and event participants. Since 2017, the Task Force has organized an annual fundraising gala, which has raised up to $130,000 annually. Supporters solicit donations from their friends through house parties around the country, and Task Force members visit other congregations to ask for contributions. The pandemic limited in-person fundraising, which was compensated for by a significant gift from a foundation.

Storytelling is an important element of the fundraising. Donors need to be convinced to give, and accounts of personal suffering, struggle, and recovery can be highly persuasive. Regardless of whether they participate in public storytelling, clients need to be able to tell their stories in order to make successful asylum claims. Al Green talks about how this is approached:

> We tell folks that – well, for example, we have an event coming up this Sunday, and we'll say 'We have slots available for two or three asylum seekers to share their stories.' We will probably end up getting two or three who sign up for it, but we also invite other folks who don't want to speak to still tag along, so they can sit in the audience. They don't have to … speak if they're not comfortable doing that, but as a way to offer support, and also as a way to get out of the house as well, and to see other people. And when they do that as well, they are far more comfortable talking on a one-on-one basis with folks as opposed to standing up in front of a church and speaking to people. And so, those who do end up going up in front of the congregation or whatever group or organization we're presenting to that week, it's left up to them to share as much as they want to. Some are glad for the opportunity to talk about what's going on in their home countries, and will talk on-end … but then there are others who will speak for two minutes, and … that's fine as well.

Although storytelling is essential to the survival of the Task Force and its clients' abilities to successfully apply for asylum, it can be problematic. As McGuirk et al. (2015) explain, storytelling has the potential to expose the teller and their loved ones to danger, it can be psychologically damaging, and apparent inconsistencies in published accounts can compromise the

strength of asylum claims. A thorough exploration of these dynamics is impossible given the scope of this chapter.

In general, foundations are reluctant to support groups like the Task Force because of its focus on LGBT immigrants, direct services, and faith. Few foundations recognize LGBT immigrants in their portfolios. A recent comprehensive analysis documented just over $11 million in contributions during 2017 and 2018 to projects focusing on LGBT "migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers" throughout the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe. In addition, many of the biggest funders of LGBT-focused projects such as the Arcus, Haas, and Ford foundations (Wallace et al., 2020, p. 94) center their giving on advocacy to the exclusion of direct services. Finally, few foundations are both progressive, and therefore likely to give to LGBT causes, and at the same time open to supporting faith-based work. For many, this connection seems at best risky, given the religious abuse outlined above and the outspoken hostility that religious organizations often display toward LGBT people. What has been said of "national and international actors" including major foundations is also true of smaller, more regional funders, particularly with respect to LGBT people: "Local faith communities are often at the forefront of humanitarian engagement with displaced populations. However, these contributions are rarely well documented and generally poorly understood… This invisibility starves local institutions of relevant resources and potentially severely constrains their influence" (Ager & Ager, 2017, p. 47).

The Task Force's orientation around faith is a source of its strength and also a complication at the institutional level. Not only does it make the group less attractive to many foundations, but it also raises a question that is difficult to answer: How can this community, whose roots and motivations are inextricably linked to religion, welcome and provide help to people regardless of their religion? Without its leaders being consciously aware of it, the Task Force has followed guidance voiced by ORAM (2012, p. 16) which emphasizes the importance of not proselytizing: "Respect must be accorded to the refugee's own perspectives on faith, no matter what they may be." Concretely, the Task Force invites clients to attend church services at least once and then to decide for themselves whether they would like to participate. Participation in prayer and discussion about religious matters are consistently available, but optional.

Conclusion

Religion is both a blessing and a curse for LGBT asylum seekers: while it is implicated in the persecution that makes many flee their homelands, it can also contribute to their resettlement and healing. This chapter has attempted to clarify these dynamics by centering attention on a single program and amplifying the voices of a few of its leaders and clients.

Like asylum seekers, this account crosses boundaries between territories that are often treated as distinct. It is about immigration, theology, politics, psychology, culture, law, charitable organizations, sexual orientation, gender identity, and much else, all at the same time. While integrating these aspects runs the risk of sowing confusion and glossing over important subtleties of meaning, ignoring them runs the risk of oversimplifying the lives and predicaments of real people who are in need.

Many of the subjects touched on summarily in this account could be expanded into research topics of their own. The functions and complications of storytelling, the place of religion in motivating and structuring humanitarian action at the local level, the empowering potential of "reclaimed" religion for survivors of religious abuse, perceptions and realities of exploitation among asylum seekers, the problematic relationship between institutional philanthropy and religion, and the spiritual dimensions of traumatic experience and recovery—all of these topics spring to mind as especially ripe for further exploration. The LGBT Asylum Task Force is unique in its focus and range of services, and perhaps will always remain so, but service providers, advocates, and scholars have much to learn from its leaders and clients.

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CHAPTER 8

Religion Resettles Refugees: Religion's Role in Integration in the United States

Todd Scribner, Matthew C. Weiner, and Katherine Clifton

Introduction

Drocella Mugorewera, who had originally fled Rwanda as a persecuted Hutu, arrived in Knoxville, Tennessee as a refugee in 2009. When she fled, "[her] weapons were always [her] rosary and [her] Bible."[1] These sacred objects helped her focus during troubled times and fueled her resilience. In fear for her safety, she went into hiding for nine months and could not attend church, which she said was the most difficult part of her

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journey. When she initially fled, she had no destination. She said, "I just prayed every day and trusted God. The people helping me along the way could have hurt me in any number of ways, but God took care of me." While reflecting on her journey to the United States, Drocella admitted, "I didn't choose to be in the U.S., but I am grateful to be here. The U.S. saved my life. I give thanks to my parents every day for giving me my faith." Drocella's first American friends nicknamed her "woman of faith."

One of the first things Drocella pursued upon her arrival was a connection to a local church; "I went, did confession, communion, and felt refreshed." A reporter once asked her what three things she would not want to live without. She replied, "The Eucharist, shelter, and friends. I cannot live without these." Her involvement with the local church helped to shape her early experiences in the United States; the benefit of this engagement was not merely of a spiritual nature, but it also brought with it tangible benefits.

A practical advantage of her involvement pertained to her children, who came to the United States sometime after her arrival. "They kept asking me when and where they would go to school," Drocella recalled. "I told them to pray. Back home they had gone to Christian schools, but here they are very expensive." She told the priest about her children's wish, so he created a scholarship fund and members of the congregation funded their high school tuition. When her husband applied for asylum in the United States, a fellow congregant in her church helped him through the process.

The church community invited Drocella's family to picnics, BBQs, and other events and "always made [them] feel welcome." The church community helped her and other refugees with housing, job searches, document translation, youth summer camps, English and other life skills, ridesharing to appointments, and co-signing for loans to build their credit. She added that places of worship can also provide a platform for refugees "to go and speak and raise awareness." The benefits accrued by Drocella and her family were reciprocated in time. Being able to speak several languages "gave [her] many opportunities to connect [with] and help" other foreign-born congregants and provided a paying job as a translator for the church. With other members of her church, she now volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, building houses for refugee families. Drocella also serves as the executive director of a local refugee resettlement agency.

Drocella originally shared her story in 2019 during a symposium organized at Princeton University's Office of Religious Life (ORL) for a national audience of refugee resettlement agencies. It was convened with the purpose of better understanding the important and often overlooked role that religion plays in the social, moral, psychological, spiritual, and civic lives of refugees after resettling in the United States and while integrating into local communities. The role that religion plays in the lives of forced migrants during their displacement, following their resettlement in the destination country, and as a support or possible hindrance to their integration has been inadequately studied among scholars, practitioners, and government agencies (see Goździak & Main, this volume). Significant numbers of refugees understand their experiences in religious and spiritual terms; many have a relationship with a church, mosque, or temple that shapes their social and civic experience in the host country. Experiences are diverse, but as Drocella's story exemplifies, for many whose lives have been disrupted, religion is often an important resource of meaning making and resilience.

Complementing this reality, the U.S. refugee resettlement system includes six faith-based voluntary agencies (VOLAGs), representing different Christian and Jewish congregations, as well as three secular VOLAGs. The central role that faith-based institutions have played in this process extends back to the origins of the program. Following the widespread displacement of individuals in Europe during and after the Second World War, religious organizations played a critical role in securing the passage of the Displaced Persons Act and in responding to the needs of displaced persons in need of resettlement. For example, from 1945 to 1951, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) sponsored and assisted a total of 167,450 immigrants and the National Catholic Welfare Conference, in coordination with local Catholic agencies across the country, helped to resettle approximately 190,275 displaced persons between 1948 and 1952 (Bazarov, 2010; Norris, 1958).

In the following decades, the United States became proactive in responding to the refugee crises that emerged in Cuba, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. During this period, refugee admissions were conducted on an ad hoc basis. The passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 standardized the refugee admissions process, clarified the objectives of the resettlement program, authorized assistance programs that would be used to achieve these objectives, and delineated the roles and responsibilities of the various federal and private agencies involved in the process.

It is hard to imagine the development of the U.S. refugee resettlement program without the ongoing engagement of religious organizations in this process. At each turn—the passage of the 1948 Refugee Act, the policy and programmatic response to Cuban, Southeast Asian, and other refugee populations, the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, and more recent developments in refugee law—churches, synagogues, and mosques have been of critical importance in the ongoing evolution of the resettlement program. They have engaged in advocacy efforts to shape legislation and executive action in a way that is consistent with a moral and religious vision and have simultaneously expanded the network of institutions that collaborate with the government in this public–private partnership.

Though we are not writing as scholars of religion, but rather as key staff members of the Religion and Resettlement Project (RRP), it is our contention that gaining a better understanding of religious ideas and images across the spectrum of refugee resettlement—from the role that organizations play in this process to the place religion has in the lives of refugees themselves—is an important area of research that deserves further exploration. This dynamic serves as an important example of public religion. The Religion and Resettlement Project, based at Princeton, is a key avenue through which these types of investigations are currently taking place.

The Religion and Resettlement Project

In 2017, the Office of Religious Life launched the Religion and Forced Migration Initiative as a response to an unprecedented human crisis of our time: the largest forced movement of people the world had faced since the Second World War. The initiative was a result of the Interfaith Policy Forum on Refugee Integration and Religious Life, convened on October 24–25, 2017 by the ORL and co-chaired by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Department of Migration and Refugee Services and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The forum grew out of an earlier interdisciplinary conference, *Seeking Refuge: Faith-Based Approaches to Forced Migration*, which took place on March 3–4, 2017 and which was also hosted at Princeton.

Seeking Refuge convened scholars, international agencies, grassroots organizers, religious leaders, students, and refugees and provided a forum to reflect on the intersection of faith and forced migration. As an Office of Religious Life located in a secular university with local, national, and

international partners, we understand our work on forced migration as a form of public religion, public scholarship, and public engagement. In this way, we hope to guide the ORL toward compassionate service while recognizing religion as a critical and complex factor in the lives of refugees and those serving them.

These early efforts provided a fertile ground out of which the more comprehensive RRP bloomed. Largely funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and co-led by Princeton University's ORL and the USCCB, the RRP is a four-year project that focuses on religion in the resettlement and integration of refugees in the United States. Drocella's story was one of many at that symposium which focused on the lacuna between religion, resettlement, and integration. It addressed gaps in practical and theoretical knowledge through conversation and community building, rather than a more formalized research-based form of scholarship. Speakers included refugees, religious leaders of refugee communities, representatives of resettlement agencies, and experts wishing to share and learn more.

Given its focus, the initiative functions as a model of how religion operates in the public sphere and is itself a partnership between secular and faith-based entities. Religion and secularity are never so simple, though, and in this case the partnership is between an ORL at a secular university and a faith-based agency that works closely with a secular government and the wider secular public. The project thus investigates, highlights, and engages communities that are both secular and religious, but is also a model of how religion operates in relationship to resettlement. Our institutional partnership is an example of how religious and secular entities can effectively cooperate to better understand the way in which religion engages the public and can further a social good. The role of the university as a social force and the role of public religion on a secular campus are of deep interest to us as organizers reflecting on the permutations of chaplaincy and engaged scholarship.

What follows is firstly a descriptive overview of our programmatic efforts; secondly, a reflection on how to approach an understanding of religion in terms of both refugee resettlement and the way our faith-based project is conceived and responds to resettlement; and thirdly, ways forward and lessons learned, in terms of both the understanding of "religion and resettlement" and institutional partnerships that respond to refugees.

Scope of the Project

A central premise of the Religion and Resettlement Project is that religion matters for refugees' mental health and civic lives, for fostering civil society, and for the secular and religious partners that engage in the phenomenon of forced migration. It also provides a broad set of tools that help refugees cope with the dramatic changes resulting from their long-term displacement, resettlement, and integration into new communities. Religion in this respect does not function in isolation. Instead, it works within and across countries, communities, and institutions. Salient figures in the public sphere and faith leaders are crucial to building communities that strengthen civil society. Studying, amplifying, and engaging the intersection of religion and resettlement is, to us, a form of public religion.

The project advances the field of migration and refugee services by using religious traditions in public theology to elevate words and stories and by exploring the religious lives of refugees and their important place in and contributions to our society. Our methodology demonstrates an effort to do in real time what historians do in retrospect, that is, to broaden our understanding of, sensitivity to, and appreciation for the role of religion in the lives of forced migrants in the United States here and now. In this way, we strive to capture and formalize religion's impact on present-day resettlement, which expedites the impact of this project.

The partnership between the ORL and the USCCB serves as a model for bringing together different institutions in order to pursue a shared goal. Due to Princeton's active undergraduate population and scholarly community and USCCB's strong connection to resettlement sites across the country and policy engagement in Washington D.C., we have been able to enrich our research, extend our reach, and gather diverse stakeholders. We have focused on several key areas that have functioned as focal points throughout the life of the project.

Firstly, since 2018 we have organized four in-person symposia and several virtual consultations that bring together refugees, religious leaders, scholars, representatives of resettlement agencies, and others who support refugees in the United States. With panels that featured refugees, faith leaders, academics, and resettlement agency directors, we examined religion's social, structural, and spiritual role in resettlement, discussed religious pluralism and diversity in the United States, and brainstormed ways to improve the U.S. resettlement system.

Secondly, our project seeks to collect oral histories of resettled refugees whose religious and spiritual lives have been consequential in their journey, resettlement, and integration. Our project is based on the premise that in order to appreciate their experiences, it is important to understand the religious and spiritual lives of refugees and refugee communities and that open-ended interviews on their own terms and in their own words are a way for them to share and for everyone to learn about this issue. As part of this oral history project, we will create an open archive that can be accessed by refugees, scholars, and refugee resettlement agencies, preserving refugees' stories amid a weakening resettlement system in the United States and around the world, providing an opportunity for civic participation with and for refugees, and enhancing spaces of dialogue, listening, and chaplaincy within communities along intercultural and interfaith lines across the country.

As a part of this effort, we have trained more than 70 undergraduate students in oral history methods and so far, have interviewed more than 170 refugees living in the United States. We have interviewed a wide range of refugees in terms of religious identities, year and place of resettlement, gender, and ethnicity. These include Holocaust survivors, Vietnamese boat people, Bosnian Muslims, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders. We also hope to conduct more oral histories with resettlement directors, social workers, and others engaged in refugee-related work. Doing so will provide a variety of perspectives that can be used to interpret the role of religion in this field.

Thirdly, to activate this archive, we are developing a curriculum based on oral history that features excerpts from interviews alongside information about refugees and the U.S. refugee resettlement system and historical contexts. This curriculum will be made available to secondary schools, places of worship, educational non-profit organizations, senior centers, and others who would like to better understand the experiences of the resettled in their own words. Because refugee narrators living across the United States have participated in this project, we are creating localized versions that showcase different narrators depending on the theme and region of the school using the curriculum. Depending on the needs of the educators we partner with, we are developing lesson plans ranging from one day to two weeks.

An example of this effort in action was the 2021 World Refugee Day. We prepared a 90-minute lesson plan that educators used alongside interfaith prayer services to extend the intention to welcome refugees with

information about them. This lesson included an explanation of who refugees are and how they arrive in the United States, an interactive role-playing exercise, and first-person excerpts from our oral history project about refugees' religious identities. We are also working with educators from the Cristo Rey School, Quaker School, and Jesuit School Networks to develop lesson plans drawing from our archive for classes pertaining to theology, world religion, race, history, and literature; we hope it will also appeal to other religious and secular schools across the country.

With USCCB's national network of schools, churches, and other educational centers, we can share this curriculum far and wide. Using the Catholic Charities networks, we can connect to and learn from local resettlement offices and can include them in our symposia and interfaith prayer services. Princeton's undergraduates are part of and often central to each of RRP's programs. In addition to their work on the oral history project, during two-month summer internships students researched and mapped the resources offered by religious and secular organizations that assist refugees and supported faith-based resettlement agencies. This kind of work encourages self-reflection, relationship-building, and deep listening, which offers students valuable opportunities to hone their vocational skills alongside their desire to make a positive impact in their communities.

Understanding Refugee and Refugee-Related Religion

As this project is partly an outgrowth of a university community, a theoretical understanding of this dynamic is important and, as such, there is an ongoing effort to inform the project with a more theoretical framework developed by an array of scholars from different disciplines (see, for example, Asad, 2003; Casanova, 1994; Marty, 1981; Neuhaus, 1984; Tracy, 1992). Nevertheless, as important as this is, the emphasis throughout the symposia was praxis-oriented and focused more on the "lived religious experience" of those from whom we were learning (Bender, 2003; Orsi, 1997; see also Primiano, 1995). The symposia began with a somewhat standard approach to what is called religious literacy when applied to a particular issue, including curated panel discussions consisting of religiously diverse refugees and religious leaders who work with refugees, but the discussions rather quickly became more personal.

Drocella attended the symposium as a secular resettlement agency employee who was invited to share her story as both a refugee and

someone actively working in the resettlement of other refugees. Given her experience being displaced and resettled in the United States, what followed was not a dry discussion about moral principles or policy procedures, but personal experiences. The lack of academic distance in her talk affected the dialogue that ensued. It was less theoretical than what might have occurred in an academic seminar; others followed her example and shared intimate moments that might not have otherwise surfaced in a different setting. When we invited refugees to share their religious stories over dinner, it frequently triggered unintended, organic, and often unacknowledged interfaith conversations with professional interlocutors.

The oral histories collected through this initiative provide another example of how religion played out in a dynamic and more intimate fashion. The practice of oral histories is a common secular journalistic and academic exercise, applied in this case to learn about the religion of refugees. When a refugee tells their religious story to another person, it often takes on the character of a spiritual autobiography or religious confession. That said, someone listening to the interview after the fact can engage with it as a more neutral commentary on public religion. The person's point of view—whether it be the interviewer, narrator, or researcher—can dramatically influence the way, in which religion is perceived in each situation. For the narrator, the story told was often wrought with emotion, which in turn often affected the interviewer, whereas a researcher might be better situated to understand the totality of oral histories so as to provide insight into the role of religion in a more normative fashion.

When we turned to students to conduct oral histories, they were trained through standard secular methods, yet their reflections were often religious in nature, insofar as they identified with a narrator of the same faith, or another faith, or in terms of reflecting on ideas expressed by the narrator, such as gratitude. Their observations often shared what ethnographers have discussed in other contexts: the stress and transformative experience of hearing another's painful story. Our noticing, and reflecting with them, says something about what it might mean to do oral history through the lens of chaplaincy, and this too enters the larger picture of what we might think of when trying to see religion in refugee work. It is hoped that the practice also instilled in the student interviewers a greater sensitivity to the role of religion in the lives of people they encounter out in the world. In these ways, the effort to better understand the role that religion plays in the lives of refugees could impart lessons that are useful in a variety of other settings.

Reflections and Next Steps

The practical focus of practitioners and the more rigorous, methodological approach of the academics—both of which are important for this project—bring with it practical benefits. For example, as we try to better understand the response to refugee resettlement from the local community, the network of practitioner contacts provides a significant population base to engage, while the ability to perform surveys, oral histories, and other quantitative and qualitative analyses that academics can bring could help provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play.

Another example in which a praxis-oriented approach could prove fruitful pertains to the project's mapping initiative, which is designed to develop a comprehensive and interactive list of organizations that engage with and support refugees following their resettlement in the United States. Such a map creates an opportunity for voluntary refugee resettlement organizations to better know and work with local community partners, while also allowing scholars to better understand the resources that local partners have to offer as a way of helping local networks better combine forces and more effectively advocate for needs in policy arenas. For example, is there a dearth of health-related support for refugees in certain parts of the country and can this deficiency be addressed through increased funding or other means? More broadly, this mapping exercise has the potential to identify "service deserts," provide a mechanism through which similar organizations in different parts of the country can connect with one another, and lead to other currently unidentified areas of collaboration. The different strengths of practitioners and academics could be leveraged for a wide range of purposes, including policy advocacy, service provision, or identification of gaps in a given region.

While religion is the central focus of the project, it is important to concede that religion is but one aspect of this engagement; there are complex moral, civic, and community elements that play off one another and affect the way in which religion interacts in the lives of refugees and in local communities. This is in some ways obvious, but is worth making explicit as a way to identify how a broader collaboration across disciplines might improve our understanding of this process. For example, more sociological and ethnographic projects could be undertaken to demonstrate through models of congregational studies and social capital the way in which a given refugee community's civic participation is tied

to its involvement in a religious community. The relationship between Christian communities that take in Muslim refugees and the interfaith dynamic that results from this engagement can have a significant impact on the impression of refugees whose country of origin is perhaps less amenable to interreligious engagement. A basic understanding of the religious pluralism of refugees in the United States would be a worthy project for those interested in understanding the diversity of refugee communities and scholars of American religious pluralism and interfaith interactions.

Another area of research could focus on the diverse types of religious organizations, be they formal, national church structures, interfaith organizations, congregations, or local religiously motivated VOLAGs. Individuals working with and on behalf of refugees in these kinds of organizations often share their stories as faith journeys. There is a vast, untapped resource here that could help us better understand what motivates Americans to work with refugees, including the role of religion in advocacy on behalf of refugees. Finally, the development of new partnerships for the purpose of improved interdisciplinary connectivity for those working with refugees is also something that should be better accounted for and tracked. We have been struck by the lack of connectivity between scholars, grassroots actors—including religious leaders—agency representatives, refugees, and students. The outcome of projects should include the social capital built and the knowledge shared for a movement or advocacy base that is attempting to make structural changes to the existing system.

For future research, it is also important to better understand the constraints and obstacles. When efforts are dependent on government funding, there are inherent limitations as to what a faith-based organization can do, most obviously including restrictions on proselytizing. While faith-based organizations are inextricably connected to the resettlement effort nationally, they themselves are sometimes hesitant to explore the role that religion plays or to examine religious paradigms because of perceived constraints on the range of religious questions that are allowed in a secular setting or, perhaps more often unexpressed, concerns as to how policy-based criticism of a given administration might affect future funding.

This is not to say that, when it comes to federal funding, religion is excised from the work of service organizations assisting forced migrants. For example, Jesuit Refugee Services USA has managed the long-standing National Chaplaincy Program, which "provides pastoral and religious

assistance to meet the needs of non-citizens detained by the Department of Homeland Security in five U.S. federal detention centers in Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New York. The National Detention Chaplaincy Program enables people of all faiths and no faith to have access to pastoral and spiritual care within either their faith tradition or no faith tradition" (Jesuit Refugee Services, 2023). Nevertheless, throughout this project there have been concerns expressed by some religious organizations that federal funding, while a necessary source of income, can inhibit the ability of these organizations to be fully religious in their public-facing identity.

Along these lines, concerns were also expressed in some of our conversations regarding the extent to which being bound to federal funding can dilute the underlying religious impulse at play in faith-based organizations, instead of transforming this impulse into an expression of secular humanitarianism. To this end, to what extent do funding sources (e.g., government grants or contracts or private secular foundations) affect the willingness of religious organizations who accept this funding to speak out about their religious identity? To what extent does it prevent them from speaking out prophetically against injustices, even when such speaking out is deemed necessary, knowing that doing so might jeopardize further funding of established programs?

There have also been some, admittedly more anecdotal, concerns about the future place of faith-based organizations in this kind of work. As the United States seems to track in a more secular direction, with the pointed increase of religious "nones," how will religious organizations be engaged in the public square, particularly those who do not conform to a more secular ethic that might diverge from traditional religious teaching? During one conversation, we were informed of a faith-based organization that was passed over for funding by a private donor because the donor expressed their decision not to fund a religiously affiliated institution. Whether this is an anomaly or something that will become more frequent is uncertain at this point.

Other factors outside of our control influenced the development of the project in ways that were not always anticipated. The emergence of a political climate related to the Trump presidency and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic led to adjustments in our programming that directly resulted from our hybrid partnership. The project took place during the Trump administration, which dramatically cut refugee admissions. These cuts in turn led to several closures of resettlement sites. In

the 2016 fiscal year, 84,994 refugees were resettled in the United States; by the end of the 2020 fiscal year, only 11,814 were resettled. Given that the resettlement program is based on a per capita funding mechanism, as fewer refugees were brought into the country, resettlement sites received less money, thus making it difficult for many of them to remain financially viable. According to a Refugee Council USA report, between the time that Donald Trump assumed the presidency through 2019, more than 100 local resettlement sites were forced to close due to these cuts, some permanently and others perhaps just temporarily (Refugee Council USA, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, no palpable sense of unease was expressed by the symposia participants about the future of the resettlement program, yet they continued to recognize the growing needs of populations served through the program. These sentiments were only exaggerated given the anti-immigrant rhetoric that had become increasingly pronounced at the time, often from people living in religious communities. Given the hardline approach that the Trump administration took on migration more generally, it became difficult for religious organizations involved in refugee resettlement to wrestle with the substantial support their coreligionists showed for these policies. For example, in 2016, 60% of white Catholics (52% of all Catholics) voted for Trump (Martinez & Smith, 2016). The juxtaposition between the support for an administration that was overtly restrictionist and the rhetoric of religious organizations that supported migration-related admissions refocused our attention away from the role of religion in the lives of refugees to how religiously informed communities are responding to refugee crises and resettlement efforts at the local level. As of this writing, we remain in the preliminary stages in trying to figure out how best to analyze and understand the response to refugee arrivals at the local level—both positive and negative—but see this exploration as an important area of further research.

Because of the COVID-19 lockdown, we were forced to cancel upcoming symposia that would have allowed us to continue our in-person work with service providers, advocates, educators, and others involved in this field. Like many other organizations, we were forced to convene small virtual gatherings to learn about COVID-19 responses within the resettlement world. The upside to this situation is that saving the costs of the canceled symposia allowed us to appropriate funds for activities that might have otherwise gone overlooked. For example, more time and effort were

given to the above-mentioned resource mapping program, which has so far mapped over 1,800 non-profit organizations working nationally with and for refugees. The reliance on remote learning and virtual engagements has also expedited the development of the oral history curriculum, the initial convening of small group sessions that are allowing us to better understand the role of religion at the local level, and similar initiatives.

While our project has important outcomes, we understand the kind of institutional partnership we have developed to be a model for further analysis and development. To be precise, we think that partnerships between universities and VOLAGs and similar organizations have immense potential. This is being done elsewhere, including a partnership between the USCCB and the University of Notre Dame that explored migration-related enforcement efforts in the United States, Germany, and Greece. The Center for New North Carolinians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is engaging local organizations to focus on welcoming different migrant populations into the state. Given diverse engagements of this sort, pulling together a meeting of groups already engaged in these kinds of partnerships might prove fruitful as we try to expand their reach to other organizations and to initiate new relationships between those already involved in this kind of engagement.

Conclusion

We describe our project as illustrating a collaborative and exploratory effort to leverage the strengths of a university and of an established non-governmental organization, and we point to ways in which the partners complement one another. As one of the federally funded VOLAGs, the USCCB is positioned to provide a national audience to a single university and to provide both local and national opportunities for service, research, and the distribution of materials, goods, projects, and ideas. Working with a faith-based VOLAG creates the opportunity for a secular university and its students to see the important role that religion plays in resettlement, to learn the history behind it, to understand the moral orientation that leads to it, and likewise to prompt students to share their own reasons for interest and involvement, either formally or informally as a kind of public religion interfaith practice. Religious identity and religious conflict as well as the religious nature of the resettlement agency and their local congregational partners play an undeniable role in the way resettlement

takes place; this is something for universities and those working within them to better understand.

As part of a university, the Office of Religious Life can coordinate the interdisciplinary expertise of scholars, the volunteerism and career and vocational development of students, and—in times of financial and political constraints—the ability to leverage student labor. The university's involvement in refugee advocacy stretches well beyond its faculty and research capacity and is instead better seen in terms of the university as a social and moral force, as a community of care that partners with other nonprofits to respond to situations as resentment. It would also prove fruitful to examine the potential in engaging alumni who might be in a position to support and participate in such initiatives. One possible limiting factor with the current efforts is that scholars are connected to one another through professional organizations, but often do not know of efforts at their own university, let alone university efforts themselves being connected topically in a way that could mobilize and educate.

There is also the consideration of what role ORLs have at secular universities, given what might be a prevailing assumption that such universities may not have a strong religious presence on campus. This is a mistaken understanding of university life. Many secular universities have substantial ORLs and partner with many religious institutions for public work. Beyond the various ORLs at many universities, one could also look at Newman Centers or other religiously based organizations that play an important role in the lives of students.

Offices of Religious Life are multifaceted in the services that they can provide, yet distinctive in that they tend to have the more organic and flexible nature of an office, in comparison with the more professionalized and narrowly drawn organizations on campuses; the insistence on including confessional, self-reflective, and vocational aspects of those working together—be they students, scholars, activists, or the refugees themselves—is a critical aspect of this work. The spaces created by these kinds of institutions also allow religious actors and leaders to engage in the research life of the university in a way that complements scholarship and secular advocacy, but in a way that reflects the situation of a practitioner rather than that of an academic.

Our understanding is admittedly anecdotal at this point, but what becomes clear is that the professional and vocational efforts taken up at universities are diverse, including the potential for structural partnerships at the local and national levels and the role that students can play.

How and why do universities care about refugees, even those without scholars or other professionals focused professionally on the topic? This is another area of research that is important for understanding and mobilizing support, and one that our partnership has drawn attention to, in ways that leads to inspiring stories.

Note

1. This and subsequent quotes come from her testimony shared during a symposium at Princeton in 2019.

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CHAPTER 9

"I Was a Stranger and You Invited Me in": A Christian Perspective on the Humanitarian Crisis at the Poland–Belarus Border

Katarzyna Marianna Durajska

Introduction

In the summer and fall of 2021, the world was watching the humanitarian crisis at the Polish–Belarus border, where thousands of refugees from far-flung countries were trying to enter Poland. Brought to Belarus by "travel agents" and transported to the Polish border (Onet News, 2021), the refugees hoped that Poland would be their gateway into Europe. They hoped for safe haven, but found hostility and push-back.

The Polish government did not see the unfolding and rapidly changing situation at the border as a humanitarian emergency. Instead, they saw the asylum seekers as a security threat. Citing danger to Polish citizens living in the borderlands, on September 2, 2021, the President of Poland declared a state of emergency in 15 localities in the Podlasie Province

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and 68 localities in the Lublin Province. The state of emergency severely curtailed civil liberties in the country. Journalists, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and Good Samaritans who were not living or working in the affected areas were not allowed to travel to the border (Journal of Laws, item 1612).

Long at odds with the European Union, Poland did not request assistance from the EU in resolving the humanitarian crisis. Luckily, the government did not approach Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, either. "Frontex has repeatedly failed to take effective action when allegations of human rights violations are brought to its attention," said Eva Cossé, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, commenting on the 2015 "refugee crisis" (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Some commentators concluded that the situation at the border was advantageous for the Polish government. Inciting fear of the Other served the Polish government well during the 2015–2016 refugee crisis" (Cywiński et al., 2019), when right-wing politicians orchestrated anti-refugee and anti-Muslim campaigns (Goździak and Márton, 2018; Main, 2020). Currently, the government wants to divert people's attention from political and economic problems in the country, such as inflation, rising fuel prices, the coronavirus epidemic, and the recurring questions about the condition of democracy in Poland.

Meanwhile, the refugees at the border are suffering from hunger, thirst, and cold. Violating the principle of *non-refoulement*, the Polish border guards have forced refugees back into Belarus, making it impossible to launch their asylum claims. Activists and volunteers provide humanitarian, legal, and medical assistance to people outside the state-of-emergency zone, while local residents provide help within the zone. As of November 10, 2021, 11 refugees died on the Polish side of the border, though activists assume that the number is much larger.In this essay, I want to take a closer look at the response (or lack thereof) to the humanitarian emergency at the border through a Christian lens. Members of the predominantly Roman Catholic Polish government claim that they promote Christian values in all of their actions. My essay is rooted in both my volunteer efforts at the border and my research about the people helping refugees in Cieszyn, a small border town in southern Poland on the east bank of the Olza river (Durajska, 2020). I am an engaged anthropologist (Kirsch, 2018) active in a local initiative called "Granica dla granicy" [Border for Border]. Since 2016, I have taken part in activities supporting refugees, including fact-finding missions, protests,

and information campaigns. These activities have given me unprecedented access to the developments at the border. I apply anthropological, ethical, and theological perspectives in both my actions of solidarity with refugees and in my empirical research, including "netnography," online research originating in ethnography and used to understand social interactions in contemporary digital communications contexts (Jemielniak, 2013; Kozinets, 2010).

Shreds of Information

It is difficult to analyze the current situation at the border. The crisis is ongoing. Each day, the media present new information about the operations of the army and the border guards. The weather is changing rapidly; the crisis started at the end of the summer, while winter is now approaching and death from hypothermia is becoming a serious threat to the refugees. I have heard stories of people trapped at the border. It is difficult to estimate the number of people camping in the forests. The European Union has accused President Alexander Lukashenko of orchestrating the influx of migrants to pressure the EU to back down over sanctions placed on his government. Poland and Lithuania claim that at least one state-owned Belarusian travel company made it easy for refugees to visit, while a state carrier more than doubled flights on a route that is popular with asylum seekers. Lukashenko denies facilitating the crisis, although he has said he would no longer hold back refugees due to the penalties imposed by the EU after a disputed presidential election last year and the subsequent crackdown on protesters.

Observers and solidarians at the border receive an incessant flow of news and an endless stream of comments. While the information is plentiful, we all live in filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011): any given person receives only selected information. This happens not only because we choose the media we want to follow and the company of like-minded people, but also because that is how the online media operate. The algorithms of search engines such as Google and social media sites such as Facebook filter available information to suit the users' views and interests. Filter bubbles and resulting echo chambers polarize society and impede dialogue.

Members of communities located within the state-of-emergency zone have limited access to unbiased national information. Journalists and representatives of human rights non-governmental organizations are barred from the zone. The stories shared on social media are created by

activists and people living in the zone. These are short, emotional, and very personal reports—slices of the daily reality of the people who have been affected by the humanitarian crisis.

On her Facebook page, Eliza Kowalczyk, who lives in the state-of-emergency zone, wrote a post entitled "Without a Trace" that recounts one of her encounters with a refugee family begging to not be returned to Belarus. Here are excerpts from her post:

> I dreamt that I was holding a refugee child in my arms.
>
> I hadn't finished my breakfast yet when, in front of my window, with a view onto the church, I noticed a commotion in the parking lot. The border guards! I grabbed my backpack, put some food in it and ran. Three people were sitting at the curb, surrounded by border guards. I went over (messaging my friends to let them know that help is needed) and asked the refugees if I could offer them food and water. One of the guards told me to wait, but a woman sprang up and ran towards me, crying, hugging me, and begging "No Belarus."
>
> And then, horror! One of the men opened a travel bag and there was an infant inside. I started crying. I knelt beside them and opened my backpack with food. … I stroked the little child, turned my head and saw four children, a man, and a pregnant woman. They showed me a yellow liquid they were given by Belarusians and asked for milk. They wanted to exchange euros to buy something at the local store. I ran to get the milk at the store, on credit, because I had no money on me. … The refugees wanted international protection. One of the guards told them that they have no right to request it.
>
> A little later, down the street, I see four boys in the back of a truck. They are eating chocolate and say "No Belarus." The women weep; the mother takes the infant out of the travel bag to board a bus the refugees are being forced onto. I take the child in my arms, he cries, I pat him and rock him just as I did my own kids when they were little. My nightmare has come true.
>
> One of the border guards says: "They could have just stayed at home!" The guards return to the border post. In just a few minutes, the refugee family will disappear without a trace.

The general public will never know their story. The absence of independent journalists at the border leads to false narratives manufactured by politicians and state-run television. These narratives dehumanize asylum seekers, presenting them as "illegal immigrants" akin to the ruthless protagonists of the Swedish Netflix series, *Snabba Cash*. Government

officials also promote a false image of the refugees at the border. The Minister of the Interior accused them of having connections with terrorist organizations and presented them as criminals, pedophiles, and zoophiles (Ministry of the Interior and Administration, 2021).

The Crisis at the Border as a Response to the Other

Human rights and NGO activists have urged Polish authorities to allow refugees access to humanitarian, medical, and legal assistance; to permit independent media and agencies that serve refugees to enter the state-of-emergency zone; and to allow refugees to launch their asylum claims instead of transporting them back to Belarus. Advocates have called for upholding the rights of asylum-seekers and complying with international law while ensuring the safety of local residents and protecting the security of Polish borders. Poland is a signatory of both the 1951 *Refugee Convention* and the 1967 *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Poland ratified both in 1991 and should live up to the promises made.

Since the very beginning of the humanitarian crisis at the border, the public debate spearheaded by civil society has invoked Christian values. One of the slogans used in the protests is "Jesus was also a refugee." As part of a social campaign, Fundacja Ocalenie [Rescue Foundation] created a video showing people walking through a forest at night. Somebody blocks their path and it turns out they are Mary and Joseph. The video ends with a quote from the Gospel of Matthew (25:35): "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Agencja K2, 2021).

Local communities also get involved in providing assistance to refugees. In the words of the mayor of Michałowo, Marek Nazarko, the commune is a great "symbol of humanity and humanitarianism," not a contemporary Jewabne, where Poles slaughtered their Jewish neighbors during World War II (Nazarko, 2021). Michałowo resembles Lampedusa, the southernmost Italian island in the Mediterranean Sea, where local residents chose to help refugees from Africa trying to reach Europe. One of the island residents remarked that.

> these people come from Africa to tell us how they perceive us, who we are for them. And also, for us to find out whether we have the grace to act, whether we can rise up to the challenge of that grace. … In general, we think of ourselves as people who have low salaries, who are unappreciated, unrecognized, overworked, subject to violence. In order to face the

> arriving refugees, we must answer the question John the Baptist posed to Jesus: Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? … I tell believers that waiting for the right opportunity to tell the truth and show courage means stagnation. We need to act (Mikołajewski, 2015, pp. 99–100).

As evidenced by the quotes from the mayor of Michałowo and the parson from Lampedusa, the encounter with the Other is a confrontation of two images: our self-image and others' image of *us*. "The Other is a mirror in which I look at myself or in which I am looked at; it is a mirror which exposes and unmasks me, which is something we would rather avoid" (Kapuściński, 2004).

Pope Francis chose Lampedusa for his first pilgrimage. In his homily, the Pope spoke of the ethical dilemma related to the arrival of the Others, the refuges:

> "Adam, where are you?" "Where is your brother?" These are the two questions which God asks at the dawn of human history, and which he also asks us. But I would like to ask different questions: Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it? Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – "suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! … Let us ask … the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this (Pope Francis, 2013).

Being open to the Other is not only a Christian duty, but also a value in every human life. In his Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti," Pope Francis defined the encounter with the Other as spiritual and cultural enrichment, as an exchange of gifts:

The arrival of those who are different, coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift, for the stories of migrants are always stories of an encounter between individuals and between cultures. For the communities and societies to which they come, migrants bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all.

… I especially urge young people not to play into the hands of those who would set them against other young people, newly arrived in their countries, and who would encourage them to view the latter as a threat, and not possessed of the same inalienable dignity (Pope Francis, 2020, pp. 115–116).

Despite the mostly hostile political climate in Poland, where Catholics constitute the majority of the population, some Catholic clergy voiced their support for refugees (Goździak et al., 2020). On August 25, 2020, Polish bishops issued a statement directed at the national and local governments, in which Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the Primate of Poland, called for respect and access to humanitarian and medical assistance at the border (Polak, 2021). Caritas Poland also took part in providing assistance at the border (Caritas, 2021).

Ordinary people became engaged as well. The nationwide initiative called "Rodziny bez granic" [Families without Borders] organized collections, protests, and meals for refugees. One of the initiatives included contacting parish priests to pray for refugees, but also to obtain permission to host information campaigns in the vicarages.

The response to the situation at the border ought to have an ecumenical character: responding to the call of the Other is at the core of Christian ethics. It is also part of other religions. Unfortunately, much of the Polish population was hostile towards the refugees. This is very disappointing for those who provide help to refugees. A wife of an Adventist Bishop wrote on her Facebook page:

> Today, I will light a candle on the grave of Polish hospitality and I will place chrysanthemums on the tomb of Christian values. Let this be our pang of guilt, a denial of pro-life postulates. Do we mean that we only care about life in the woman's womb, but not life that is born, especially if it is not Christian life? Let our religious sensitivity be offended; it is extremely selective and shamefully subjective! … Today my religious feelings are deeply offended, because in the Christian religion LOVE IS THE GREATEST EMOTION (Wasilewska-Kamińska, 2021).

Violence Towards Activists

A large part of the Polish society is hostile towards refugees. Many transfer this hostility onto fellow compatriots who provide assistance at the border, collect food and clothing, and organize protests. The problem here is not

lack of openness to dialogue, but downright attacks. In my work, I have noticed the hatred and verbal abuse: hostile messages, vulgar comments, and insults during protests. I have also been a victim of such behavior. I have met many people involved in helping refugees and most of them have experienced hate or violence. However, I have not yet met a person who has stopped their activist work due to such attacks. Violence is always a cognitive challenge. There have been attempts to explain the mechanisms of violence in philosophy, theology, biology, and social psychology. However, such actions seem impossible to understand at the emotional or spiritual level. They leave one with a sense of emptiness and harm. It is often impossible to answer questions about the source of violence:

> These are simply questions to which we have no answers. And perhaps that is the essence and the greatness of the humanities that it acknowledges the existence of questions which we will never answer. (Benedyktowicz & Czaja, 2003)

Barbara Skarga (2004) writes about two preconditions that lead to violence. The first is the need to prove that one is more powerful. The second is the fear of the Other, the resistance to otherness. The fear of otherness results from a sense of threat emanating from the encounter with the Other, a sense of threat to one's own world-view, system of values, and lifestyle. The encounter with the Other requires openness and acceptance of the fact that our perspective is only one among many. It requires us to make an effort, confront our own convictions, and most of all, step out of our comfort zone, though the consequences cannot be predicted. We never know where the encounter with the Other will lead us.

> The Other attacks my eyes so that they can see the world through the Other's eyes; the Other attacks my ears so that they can hear what the Other hears; the Other undermines the sovereignty of the point of view which is my point of view. The Other does not promise anything in return; the Other demands becoming the Other's food (Tischner, 2017, p. 8).

"Empathizers" and "Utopian Humanitarianism"

Apart from open hostility toward Polish solidarians, a patronizing narrative has also emerged that depicts them as idealists who are out of touch with reality. What is interesting and at the same time disturbing is that words such as empathy or humanitarianism gain negative meanings in this narrative. It is a language full of fear, but shrouded in rationalization and a sense of superiority. Two Facebook posts illustrate this narrative:

> Are you proposing to open the borders and forget about the safety of Poles who live near the border? They will be forced to face various difficult humanitarian and moral situations. Can you just ignore the safety of Polish citizens? Can you ignore the law? Can you put a politically correct, utopian humanitarianism above the rules of law and common sense?
>
> … maybe you will finally answer me, because none of the leftists and empathizers know how to respond. HOW MANY are we going to let in? If they drop off a million people at the border, should we take them all in, because they are hungry and cold? The countries from which they legally travel to Belarus have populations several times larger than Poland. So, I ask again – how many are we going to let in?

The pro-refugee activists are called "empathizers," which in this context suggests that empathy is a dangerous feeling that leads people to be irrational or "useful idiots." Empathy is perceived not only as an ability to sympathize with others, but also as a leftist ideology. Whereas empathy is presented as dangerous, one's own fear is rationalized. One's own feelings are justified and harmless, while the feelings of the opposite side are perceived as a threat. The concept of "common sense" is also used to rationalize one's fears.

Dehumanizing Refugees

Often, it is only the imagined Other, because the majority of Polish people have never met a refugee; they only know the image presented in the media. On the Internet, refugees are referred to as *biomass*, *human shields*, or *cattle*. This type of language dehumanizes them and deprives them of dignity. Dehumanization is a process in which victims are not perceived as humans, a process which weakens the restraint of aggressive actions and makes further aggression easier and more probable (Aronson, 2003).

Why do so many people in a predominantly Catholic country dehumanize the Other? Isn't it against Christian teaching? What does religion mean for contemporary Poles? "Catholicism in Poland has become a political idea, while Christianity means loyalty to beautiful, utopian, but—God willing—strong values" (Barbaro et al., 2021, p. 14). In Poland, Christianity is perceived in terms of national identity, but it is also a lifestyle which ensures safety, relieves worries, and alleviates hardships without requiring radical actions or difficult decisions. In the words of Jan Kajfosz,

> Christianity without the New Testament ethics would be like coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, or beer without alcohol. Just like these products can be consumed without limits and without any danger, Christianity without its risky, though constitutive element, would allow its believers to bask limitlessly in the experiences of the sacrum … without the danger of existential dilemmas, without carrying others' burdens …, without leaving one's comfort zone. (Kajfosz, 2020, p. 1086)

The figurines in the nativity scenes seem to be mere decorations with no meaning or values. Looking at a nativity scene, we do not reflect on the fact that the story of Jesus' birth is also a story about exclusion (no place at the inn), violence (the massacre of the innocents), and escape (to Egypt).

Simply Be Human

Perhaps instead of asking about the source of evil, we should be asking about the sources of goodness, kindness, and openness to the Other? When I conducted my research in the border town of Cieszyn, many of the people helping refugees (regardless of the color of their skin or their place of origin) told me that volunteering to assist refugees was part of their Christian identity and their humanity:

> If you were to finish the sentence, "I am helping foreigners because…," what would you say?
>
> Vaclav (names are changed): We were taught not be deaf to others in need. Because of our work, because of Christian values.
>
> Sylvie: I agree. It is a mission, a life attitude. If I have the opportunity to help, I help. (Durajska, 2020, p. 30)

> Pavel: I don't think you must be a Christian or a believer. You just have to be human. We are here in Central Europe and we have no direct contact with the conflict; we are kind of protected. But what about such countries as Greece, with large numbers of refugees? And then you find out that young families with many children live on some islands – they have no homes, they stay in tents, without education, in very poor conditions. If it was someone from your own family, you would try to find a way to help, but because they are somewhere far away, we are adopting a distanced approach. Are we doing what is right? (Durajska, 2020, p. 35).

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CHAPTER 10

Religion and Forced Migration at the Crossroads

Elżbieta M. Goździak and Izabella Main

Dear Reader,

We hope you enjoyed reading this volume and found much food for thought and motivation to act. In this last chapter, we want to signal gaps in both knowledge and praxis at the crossroads of religion and forced migration. Literally, crossroads are defined as a point where two roads meet, but the word is often used figuratively to mean a situation that requires important decisions to be made. We use the term in both of its meanings.

Referring to the crossroads of religion and forced migration, we draw attention to situations, practices, and places where religion and spirituality are interconnected with forced migration. The concept of religion

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and spirituality at the crossroads also refers to the heterogeneity of religion and religious (and spiritual) values. Peter Berger (1967) posited that modernity leads to the pluralization of religions because various belief systems exist in the same societies and contexts. He also argued that modernization does not necessarily lead to secularization; in many societies, religion is thriving. More recently, Berger (2016) reasoned that pluralism, often perceived as a threat to faith and associated with relativism and a loss of religious substance, is actually good for faith. He spoke of two pluralisms. "The first concerns the fact that many religions and worldviews coexist in the same society. … The second kind of pluralism involves the coexistence of the secular discourse with all of these religious discourses" (Berger, 2016, no page number).

Several contributors to this volume have shown how and where religion and forced migration meet. Religious intolerance is often a root cause of armed conflicts and the resulting forced migration (Goździak and Main, this volume). Many refugees struggle to come to terms with their religious beliefs when trying to understand the meaning of their experiences and the ensuing suffering. Describing the activities of the LGBT Asylum Task Force in Worcester, Massachusetts, Max Niedzwiecki (this volume) shows how the ministry assisted refugees in overcoming the shame and self-hatred that were rooted in religious abuse in their home countries.

There are no reliable statistics on the global number of LGBTQ asylum seekers, though numerous media articles and NGO reports estimate that thousands of LGBTQ refugees seek international protection every year (Held et al., 2022). We need to understand both the scale of this phenomenon and the lived experiences of LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers in regards to their own religious beliefs and the beliefs of those who adjudicate their cases. A special thematic cluster of *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* on asylum law and policy, sexual orientation, and gender identity includes a range of articles on the impact that categories such as "asylum seekers" or "refugees" have on queer migrants in the Paris area (Chossière, 2021); the effects of "safe country" practices on LGBTI + claimants and the extent to which the securitization of European borders is compatible with LGBTI + inclusion (Le Bellec, 2021); gender identity and gender expression as grounds for international protection (Avgeri, 2021); the impact of different normative understandings of sexuality and relationships on LGBTIQ + people's experience of the UK immigration system (Gordon-Orr, 2021); the ways transgender

refugees living in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States leverage social remittances and transnational ties to advocate for their rights within intolerant receiving countries (Soloaga, 2021); and practices used in Greece to assess credibility in asylum claims based on sexual orientation (Zisakou, 2021). Unfortunately, none of these articles explored the religious contexts in which the discussed laws, policies, practices, and lived experiences occur.

Izabela Kujawa, Agnieszka Bielewska, Nir Cohen, and Katarzyna Durajska have demonstrated in this volume how religious values and political goals are intertwined in Turkey, Israel, and Poland. Religious values often underpin decisions regarding attitudes toward refugees and asylum seekers. Some policy-makers use religious values to provide refugees with a safe haven and permit them to settle, while others use religion to reject petitions for asylum. These decisions are often related to the religious identity of the asylum seekers (Goździak and Main, this volume) and divide them into deserving and underserving refugees (Goździak, 2022; Sales, 2002). We cannot solely blame politicians for this state of affairs. We must also understand the motivations of ordinary citizens who vote for them.

Human mobility and religion have been linked both historically and semantically. Contemporary religious globalization was preceded by religious mobility and religious expansion linked to trade, imperialism, or conquest. In many religious traditions, mobility is also sacralized: pilgrimages and holy sites form the center of a theological and symbolic universe. Nowadays, members of many diasporas contribute to the growth of global religious networks. Among migrant communities, religion is seen as providing a moral guide and spiritual compass. Transnational religious networks and "circulations of people, ideas, images, values, and norms also impact on sending contexts, sometimes creating new modes of cultural distinction, leading to social tensions and conflicts" (Garbin, 2018 online).

Forced migrants often find themselves at the crossroads of mobility and immobility as they wait to be allowed to cross borders or launch an asylum claim or are forced to linger in refugee camps or detention centers. These periods of waiting are often significantly longer than the actual flight. The uncertainty of these periods of waiting puts refugees at the crossroads of physical safety and danger as well as of existence or lack of legal protection (Durajska, this volume).

Refugees and asylum seekers are not the only ones that move: religion does as well. "We assume that religious practices and organizations obediently respect national boundaries. We take stasis and boundedness as the default categories for organizing religious life while, in fact, many religious ideas and practices are often and unabashedly in motion". (Levitt, 2011, p. 159, cited in Meyer and van der Veer, 2021, p. 267)

Islam is often at the center of concerns regarding immigrant integration in Europe, Canada, and the United States. There was a rise in anti-Islam sentiments after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and jihadist attacks in France, Germany, and Spain. Richard Alba and Nancy Foner (2015) argue that in Europe "religion has become a bright boundary that separates a significant proportion of immigrant minorities from the mainstream or the cultural, institutional core of their societies" (p. 118), while religion does not form the same divisions in the United States. The reasons include religious similarity between citizens and immigrants, the socioeconomic status of Muslim immigrants, the religiosity of the majority population, and existing institutional structures (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 140). Muslims constitute only 1.1 percent of the US population. Moreover, not all of them hail from immigrant communities; African Americans account for 20 percent of the country's Muslim population (Mohamed and Diamant, 2019).

When scholars write about religion and forced migration, they mainly focus on the "world religions," while less known and less populous religions are studied mainly by anthropologists. In this volume, Johannes Bhanye examines the Nyau cult and witchcraft and the role they play in reinforcing access to and ownership of land among migrants in peri-urban Zimbabwe. Looking at the crossroads of witchcraft and forced migration, we need to better understand the practice of witchcraft and the persecution of witches and those who they bewitch. In a working paper written for the UNHCR, Jill Schnoebelen (2009) provides a global overview of the link between witchcraft accusations and displacement. She posits that accusations may cause displacement through forced exile or a personal decision to flee from the threat of harm. She demonstrates the impact of witchcraft accusations in a displacement continuum: internally displaced people's camps, refugee camps, during repatriation and reconstruction, and among resettled refugees. Schnoebelen also examines the role of governments, including decisions to outlaw witchcraft accusations and the prosecution of alleged witches in government courts.

Witchcraft-related violence, especially violence directed toward women and children, has become a source of increasing concern for human rights organizations (ActionAid, 2012; Aguilar Molina, 2006). However, the heightened attention to this issue has not translated into refugee decision-making (Dehm & Millbank, 2019). Witchcraft beliefs have been utilized by rebel groups, in places such as Uganda, Liberia, and Angola (Schnoebelen, 2009) and we need to know more about these phenomena to better adjudicate refugee claims based on membership in a particular social group.

In this volume, Ingrid Løland argues that the academic literature lacks studies on the ways that lived experiences of religion inform both real and imaginary forms of temporal and spatial displacement contexts. There is an urgent need to adequately capture the multidimensional and (dis)empowering aspects of religion in migratory experiences. In her chapter, Løland maps the storied landscape of Syrian refugee trajectories, where religion, identity, and belonging fluctuate between retrospective and future-oriented processes. More research along those lines is needed.

The contributors to this volume focused primarily on showcasing where and how religion and forced migration meet. They have not explicitly recommended what needs to change and what decisions need to be made to move the field of religion and forced migration forward. Below, we signal some of the changes that are urgently needed.

While it has been documented that religion plays an important but often overlooked role in forced migration,

> this neglect of religion in relation to the study of refugee issues is not simply an empirical problem, but also a conceptual one. It stems from the secularist approach in mainstream social and cultural science discourses, according to which religion, understood in terms of private belief, is marginal. (Meyer & van der Veer, 2021, p. 257)

The contributions in the volume *Refugees and Religion: Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories* call for a rethinking of religion from the vector of mobility as a way to correct a scholarly bias toward "the nation as the taken-for-granted habitat of religion and unit of scholarly analysis" (Meyer and van der Veer, 2021, p. 267).

A new approach to the trauma experienced by many forced migrants is also needed. The literature on migration records a robust discussion about

the concepts, values, and cultural appropriateness of mental health interventions to reduce the psychological burden of war and armed conflict in resource-poor countries (Bracken et al., 1995; de Vries, 1998; Dyregrov et al., 2002; Mezyey and Robbins, 2001; Pupavac, 2001; Silove et al., 2000; Summerfield, 1999). The concept of PTSD and trauma-related services are the main focus of this controversy (Ommeren et al., 2005), which is compounded by the relatively recent development of a new field—labeled "psychosocial"—that has been introduced by international organizations working in resource-poor countries.

Critics of these concepts and approaches point to the medicalization of normal distress and the possible harm of assuming that Western models of illness and healing are valid across cultures, while others consider denying the importance of traumatic stress to be a professional error and the denial of preventable suffering. In an attempt to generate strategic advice to program designers in war-torn countries, Ommeren et al. (2005) have attempted to survey expert opinion. The authors have put forth eight principles resulting from their research that should be used when formulating response strategies:

(1) contingency planning before an acute emergency
(2) assessment before intervention
(3) a long-term development perspective
(4) collaboration with other agencies
(5) provision of treatment in primary health care settings
(6) access to services
(7) training and supervision
(8) monitoring indicators.

Derrick Silove (2005) and Derek Summerfield (2005) have responded to the proposed principles in two separate essays, both published in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. In his response, Silove (2005) stresses that these principles "present a radical challenge to those single-issue advocates promoting trauma counseling programs or short-term psychosocial projects" (p. 75). Silove points out the necessity to distinguish between common, self-limiting psychological responses to violence and the persisting reactions that become disabling. He believes that the best therapy for acute stress reaction is a social one: providing safety,

reuniting families, creating effective systems of justice, offering opportunities for work, study, and other productive roles, and re-establishing systems of meaning and cohesion—religious, political, social, and cultural. He also points to the challenges inherent in changing entrenched perspectives and the practices of international agencies and donors to prioritize support of integrated, community-based programs focused on the social needs arising from psychological disturbances, rather than special issues or particular diagnoses.

Summerfield (2005), on the other hand, indicates that there is tension in the materials on refugee mental health issues from international agencies—such as the World Health Organization—"between the wish to acknowledge local worlds and the wish to promote Western mental health technology as a reproducible toolkit" (p. 76). He reminds us that the Western mental health discourse introduces core components of Western culture, including a theory of human nature, a definition of personhood, a sense of time and memory, and a secular source of moral authority. None of this is universal.

What is needed, in our opinion, is support for empirical research, including epidemiological and qualitative studies to assess both the scope of the issues facing forced migrants affected by armed conflict and the cultural appropriateness of the projects being implemented. This research needs to be formulated and packaged in a manner that translates readily into new program designs or policy approaches. More importantly, refugees and internally displaced persons must be active participants in the design and implementation of this research and any ensuing policy and program recommendations.

Research, policy-making, and programming at the crossroads of religion and forced migration need to also consider the gender of forced migrants. While most religious movements are rooted in transformative visions, which focus on the inner, ethical motivations of the person and respect for all individuals regardless of gender or ethnicity, in reality there is an abundance of oppressive interpretations of religious texts promoted by male-dominated religious institutions. Obviously, these interpretations can be challenged by alternative interpretations of religious texts; in fact, that is what many feminists are attempting to do. Feminist theologies reclaim the egalitarian spirit of many religious texts to counter the current life-and-death threat that religious extremists present to women in many contexts. For example, Iman Hashim (1998) and Fatima Miernissi (1991) argue that the practices of veiling and *purdah* (seclusion) have

no foundation in the Qur'an and discuss the manner in which patriarchy has circumvented the Qur'an's essentially egalitarian message. Hashim also talks eloquently about reasons for feminist engagement with Islam. However, as Sadia Ahmed (1998) describes in her article on religious extremism in Somalia, feminist engagement with religion and gendered reinterpretation of religious texts are only useful for the majority of women if women at the grassroots can gain access to these arguments. It is their bodies which become the battlegrounds for competing interpretations of religious texts, so they require basic education and knowledge of religious texts as well as arguments to serve as weapons against fundamentalist interpretations of their religion.

Research is important, but so is law and policy. As Julian M. Lehmann reminds us, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees has undergone a remarkable evolution and has remained relevant by providing guidance for elements of the definition of *refugee*. The Convention has also long overcome the initial postwar, Eurocentric bias. However, Lehmann also emphasizes that in order "to endure and maintain universal appeal, the Convention needs continuous application by a community of practice committed to objective principle, all the while the Convention is under constant strain of measures for migration control, and despite imperfect supervisory mechanisms" (Lehmann, 2019, p. 15).

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